the weekly Standard

SEPTEMBER 10, 2001

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BUSH, THE DEMOCRATS, AND SOCIAL SECURITY
DAVID BROOKS • STEPHEN F. HAYES

# EUROJUSTICE

## An exercise in posing and preening

By Jeremy Rabkin

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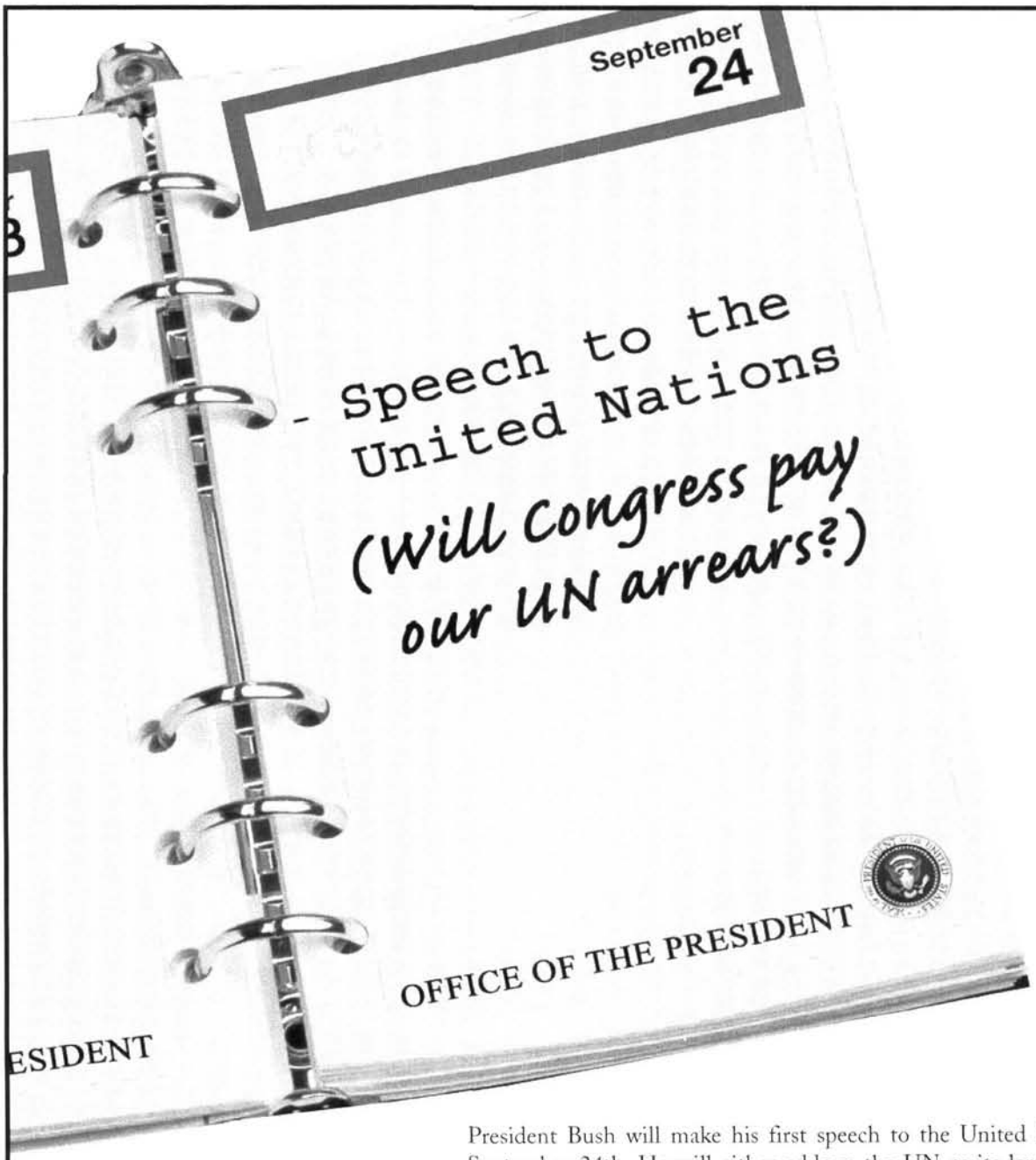


President Bush will make his first speech to the United Nations on September 24th. He will either address the UN as its largest debtor, facing sharp criticism and even embarrassment for unpaid bills, or as the leader of a nation that keeps its word and honors its commitments. The President and Secretary of State Colin Powell want the U.S. to pay its bills.

In 1999, Congress passed the bi-partisan Helms-Biden legislation that promised the U.S. would pay its overdue bills to the UN if it met certain conditions. The UN did that and more, even naming an Inspector General to root out waste and mismanagement. But now Congressional gridlock is blocking payment.

Before President Bush makes his first speech at the UN, Congress should honor our commitment and pay our overdue bills.

**Great nations keep their word.**

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# Yes, Another Reason to Hate Israel

Irving Kristol famously remarked that a neoconservative was a liberal who had been "mugged by reality." He later added that a neoliberal is a liberal who, having been mugged by reality, refused to press charges. Tom Wolfe's fictional bond trader Sherman McCoy further elaborated in *The Bonfire of the Vanities* that a liberal is "a conservative who's been arrested." So THE SCRAPBOOK is wondering, What do you call someone who, when mugged by Palestinians, blames the Israelis?

Try "a public radio listener." The August 25 edition of "Savvy Traveler," a Minnesota Public Radio show distributed by Public Radio International, featured a piquant call by "David from Minneapolis" to host Diana Nyad, who was doing a segment on travelers' experiences with crime. "David" told of returning late to his Jerusalem hotel.

DAVID: I decided to enter through Damascus Gate which is the entrance to the Arab quarter.

NYAD: Mm-hmm?

DAVID: So I went in, and it was absolutely deserted. And so I walked down the street and a couple of people started to walk beside me. And one of them started to talk to me and—and after just a minute or two, I ended up being shoved up against the wall by about five or six of them.

NYAD: Oh, no.

DAVID: They started, sort of rifling through my stuff, and they had me just shoved up against the wall. And somehow I got out, and I just ran screaming. And after like 30 seconds, all these guys with machine guns come down, all—it's the Israeli guard.

NYAD: Oh.

DAVID: There's probably about eight of them, and they all have huge machine guns and huge flashlights. I felt really, really—I felt more wrong having that happen than being robbed, I think. I felt more—it felt terrible being on the side of people with machine guns.

NYAD: So who was the bad guy in the end?

DAVID: Well, it's hard to say. I mean, you know, it's no fun to get robbed, but it's also no fun to, you know, have machine guns on your side. It makes you feel really ambivalent about why you're there and, you know, who deserves to be there.

NYAD: I can understand that. On the—on the other hand, you know, if they hadn't come around, you don't know, you could have been like, you know, have your head—your head—your head kicked in, something like that.

DAVID: It—it was just a really interesting thing because I know a lot about biblical history, and that's kind of the Israel that I was looking for.

NYAD: Mm.

DAVID: And, of course, I knew contemporary politics, but it just made it really—made it really real for me, the street level of it.

NYAD: Yeah, and such an instant volatility.

DAVID: Yeah.

NYAD: I mean, if you as a tourist in the middle of the night just yelled out a couple of times and within, sounded like you're saying 10, 15 seconds, they swarmed around . . .

DAVID: Mm.

NYAD: I mean, they—they are ready. They were ready to go.

DAVID: Mm-hmm. Yeah, they were definitely ready. And they—you know, they were really, really anxious to find a bunch of Palestinians that they could, you know, harass or arrest or beat up or something.

NYAD: Yeah. Well, David, I'm just glad you're all right.

DAVID: Yeah.

Forgive us, but what we're wondering now is what to call someone who wants to see David mugged again! ♦

## Hemp Fans at Justice

The brochure shown below was given to THE SCRAPBOOK by a friend and former government employee who banks at the Justice Federal Credit Union. It depicts custom covers that members of the credit union can buy for their checkbooks. The one on the right, available for $9.95, is a Kente Cloth cover that "coordinates with the African-American Heritage checks." But it's the one on the left that really caught our eye. Yes, you read it correctly, it's the "Natural Hemp" checkbook cover, which complements "Liberty Recycled checks." Plus which, it's a really nifty fashion statement that lets you advertise your scorn for the nation's drug laws every time you write a check!

Hemp, for the uninitiated, is another name for the plant that produces marijuana. Its cultivation (though not its use in products like the checkbook) happens to be illegal in the United States, and so the promotion of hemp has become a pet project over the last



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decade for marijuana-legalization activists. We imagine there are some pro-pot activists somewhere having a snickering fit over this, in between attacks of the munchies. Especially since the law banning hemp is enforced by any number of members of the Justice Federal Credit Union, which serves (among others) employees of the Department of Justice and its bureaus, such as the FBI, the DEA, and the U.S. Marshals Service.

And we won't even ask what marketing genius had the creative idea of yoking hemp to African-American heritage. No doubt some soon-to-be-former federal contractor. ♦

## Great Moments in Washington Lawyering

Those of you who saw Connie Chung's interview of Gary Condit will remember his denial of a relationship with flight attendant Anne Marie Smith. Smith has claimed that Condit had an affidavit prepared for her, in which she was supposed to deny a year-long affair with him. Why, Chung asked, "would you want her to say that she didn't have a relationship with you?" Replied Condit: "Because she didn't."

This turns out to have been a lie. Or at least, if you or I had said it, without benefit of counsel, it would be deemed a lie. But Condit has retained a high-powered Mr. Fixit, aka Washington lawyer Abbe Lowell, who went on *Larry King Live* the following night to issue this retraction.

"Look," Lowell expostulated. "The exchange was going hot and heavy at that point and she was asking about the affidavit and she was asking about lawyers, and then, did you have a relationship? And I think the 'no' came out, and the 'no' may not have applied to what it looks like it applied to."

That's a line to remember, though we can't recommend that untrained professionals try it at home. Lowell should know that he has our highest admiration. Our contempt doesn't apply to whom it looks like it applies to. ♦

## Pay Up, They Explained

A couple of weeks ago, we dilated on the subject of U.S. government payments to China for "services" rendered in the spy-plane incident. It looked like we were being semi-tough in paying Beijing $34,576 instead of the million dollars the Chinese government had demanded for taking such good care of its American hostages. Unfortunately, we missed a story in the *South China Morning Post* that suggests the effective amount paid may have been larger.

"In June," the paper reports, "the Defense Department awarded a $5.8 million contract to Lockheed Martin . . . to dismantle the spy plane and transport it. . . . A substantial but unspecified amount was paid to the Chinese Government, the Lingshui airfield and state and PLA-owned contractors for items and services provided to the Lockheed Martin crew. 'They [Lockheed Martin] were writing checks left and right,' said a U.S. government official." ♦



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# Casual

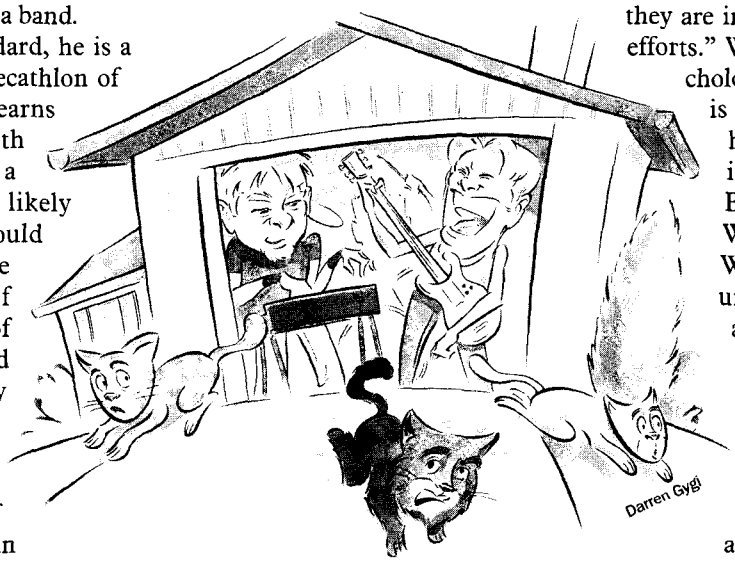
## Counting Crowes

I was surprised to read in the newspaper the other day that the movie star Russell Crowe has just concluded a month-long tour with his rock 'n' roll band, a group of Australians called "30 Odd Foot of Grunts." I was surprised for reasons that had nothing to do with the stupid name. I didn't know Russell Crowe was on tour, for one thing; and I didn't know Russell Crowe had a band. I wouldn't have thought it necessary for him to have a band.

By any objective standard, he is a man who has won the decathlon of human existence. He earns more money in a month than you or I will earn in a lifetime, and he has likely banked more than he could ever spend. He enjoys the adulation of millions of strangers, the respect of his peers, and the awed deference of the creepy movie moguls who would technically be considered his bosses if they weren't so afraid of ticking him off. He has, in short, satisfied all the ambitions that might vex a normal fellow in twenty-first century America. Cars, houses, boats, power tools—he has everything a man could want. He has Meg Ryan's phone number.

He has everything, apparently, but the essential thing: He isn't a rock star. Clearly this is a source of some annoyance for him, as it is for most men. Crowe's aspiration—along with that of other matinee idols with vanity bands, such as Bruce Willis and Keanu Reeves and Dennis Quaid and many others—reflects the general consensus among men that being a rock star is more than a job, more than a career, more indeed than a way of life. Being a rock star is the summit of cool, a kind of apotheosis, the proper end and final cause, in Aristotelian terms, of masculinity. (Aristotle used to play bass for the Funkadelics.) Movie stars routinely strive to be rock stars, you'll notice, but it seldom works the other way round. Rock stars don't want the demotion.

The rock 'n' roll ambition settles in early. As a contagion it moves from teen to teen, erupting first in that auspicious moment when, in the privacy of his bedroom with the stereo blaring, the youngster feels his fingers twitch over the imaginary fretboard of an air guitar. It continues, for some of us, into late adolescence and beyond, often culminating in garage bands that terrorize the neighborhood cats with calamitous cover versions of "Johnny B. Goode" or (more recently) "Smells Like Teen Spirit." And in many cases—maybe most cases—it never goes into remission. The next time you're at a stop light, cast a glance at the car next to you. That guy in the Camry with the baby seat in back may look like he's singing along to the radio. But in the private precincts of his heart he's really Jim Morrison, before Jim got all puffy and moved to Paris and fell face first in the bath. In our dreams we are all rockers in their prime.




For the average baby-boomer schlub, the durability of the dream is easy to explain. Sex is at the heart of the matter, as it usually is. A rock star in *Almost Famous*, last year's rose-tinted movie about 1970s rock, pompously tells an interviewer why he pursues his art: "It's a voice inside you, man, and it says, 'Here I am and f— you if you can't understand me!'" After a pause he adds: "Plus the chicks are great." Making the obvious seem as obscure as possible, as they so often do, evolutionary psychologists have even conducted studies proving—to quote one textbook—that "most pop music is produced by men aged between 20 and 40, the very age when they are investing heavily in mating efforts." What an evolutionary psychologist can't explain, though, is the particular men who have enjoyed all these mating opportunities. From Buddy Holly to Charlie Watts, Ringo to Barry White—this is a line-up of unlikely sex objects. The alchemy of rock stardom performs miracles. It even transformed Rod Stewart into an object of desire. There really is a rock 'n' roll heaven.

But still: How to account for the ambition of Russell Crowe and Bruce Willis and their colleagues in movie stardom, for whom, demonstrably, the "chicks" are already "great"? I did some digging and found, on his band's website, the lyrics to many of Crowe's songs, and reading them I saw the explanation. He says he has a "hunger for self-expression," ventilated in lyrics like these to his "High Horse Honey": "You can't live your life on the fact you're pretty / Hold it up like you're head of the class / Cause the good lord above who parted the waters / Will soon start spreading your ass / All over the couch." Some truths, beyond the reach of the filmic art, can only be approached in song.

**Andrew Ferguson**



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A world of ideas on public policy.

# *Advertising and the Informed Patient*

***Merrill Matthews Jr., Ph.D.***

Sometimes the benefits of freedom of speech are best seen in the little things. Take direct-to-consumer (DTC) drug advertising, for example.

Increasingly, patients and healthcare consumers want access to information. One recent survey found that more than 50 percent of adults who go on the Web use it for healthcare information.

Advertising is only a vehicle for getting information to potential customers. With respect to prescription drugs, it may be the most cost effective way to reach people with information about widespread medical conditions and new drugs to treat them.

In the United States, DTC drug advertising has been growing by leaps and bounds. In less than a decade, it has increased from $55 million (1991) to $1.8 billion (1999).

U.S. consumers appear to like the fact that pharmaceutical companies are reaching out directly to them. According to a recent survey by the federal Food and Drug Administration:

- 51 percent of respondents who had seen a doctor in the last three months said that a prescription drug ad caused them to look for more information about the drug.
- And 72 percent rejected the notion that prescription drug advertisements made it seem that a doctor wasn't needed to decide if a drug was right for them.

As a result of this information outreach people with medical conditions – many of whom simply decided to live with the condition since they had no idea an effective treatment existed – are now seeking care. And they're getting relief.

However, most European countries and Canada either prohibit or severely limit such advertising. As a result of these restrictions on speech, Europeans and Canadians are effectively being excluded from the healthcare information revolution that is going on in the United States.

***Increasingly, patients and healthcare consumers want access to information***

Critics of DTC advertising claim that it increases total healthcare spending, which is one reason why countries with government-funded healthcare systems restrict such ads.

It is true that total healthcare spending may go up, but there is nothing wrong with that if people are getting treated for medical conditions that had gone undiagnosed. Is it better to leave people with treatable medical conditions untreated and in pain because a government or insurance company doesn't want people to know there is a cure?

Some critics also contend that advertising makes drugs more expensive. But such concerns reveal a lack of understanding about the effect of advertising. In a competitive market, advertising can – and should – lower costs by expanding consumer awareness and increasing sales, lowering the fixed costs per consumer.

The drug industry is very competitive; no drug company has more than 5 to 6 percent of the worldwide pharmaceutical market. The fact is that in a competitive market, drug companies cannot just add the cost of advertising to the price of their products because they could lose market share.

Just consider that among the top 50 prescription drugs advertised DTC in the U.S. in 1999:

- Three were oral antihistamines for allergies.
- Four were inhaled respiratory steroids.
- Three were oral diabetes medications.
- Three were antiarthritic drugs.

The growing level of competition forces drug companies to keep prices down. For example, the first prescription antidepressant was released in 1988. All of the subsequent antidepressants were launched at a lower price than the original drug, indicating an attempt to gain market share. Thus competition led to more choices and lower prices.

A generation ago physicians were the possessors of all medical information. Patients went to physicians and accepted evaluations and diagnoses almost without question. Today, things are very different. Increasingly, healthcare is shifting from a physician-directed system to a patient-directed one. And direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical ads are a response to the transitional process, not the cause of it.

People want access to medical information, and DTC drug ads are one source of that information. Prohibiting or severely restricting such ads means that people who could be treated will continue to suffer, and may face more extensive medical problems when they finally do enter the healthcare system.

***Dr. Merrill Matthews Jr. is a visiting scholar with the Institute for Policy Innovation (www.ipi.org) in Dallas, Texas. This article is based on his new study, "Who's Afraid of Pharmaceutical Advertising?", which is available from IPI (+(972) 874-5139 or info@ipi.org).***

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# Correspondence

## Call Me Impressed

As a Karl Rove enthusiast, I enjoyed reading Fred Barnes's take on his role in the White House thus far ("The Impresario," August 20/August 27).

Barnes can say what he wants about Karl Rove's being nothing like James Carville, and he is right. Rove is nowhere near as slimy as Carville is and was. But the media have been comparing Rove to Carville and George Stephanopoulos ever since Bush started to make his way to the national stage in 1999. The liberals are playing politics as usual, and Barnes makes that very clear.

Rove is more than a political adviser; that has been obvious from President Bush's days as governor. Rove is on the front lines. He may be making policy and directing the way the administration goes, but he is also on the front lines taking the brunt of whatever decision is made on a given day. Rove's influence in this administration is great, but that is the way President Bush governs. He has surrounded himself with incredibly competent people.

It is very refreshing after eight years to have someone who will answer questions and take the lead rather than avoid everybody, wait for the political winds to take shape, and then respond. In Rove we have someone who will answer the questions and not double talk us like the last White House occupants did.

Steve Parkhurst
*San Antonio, TX*

## Home-grown Character

William Bennett and Edwin J. Delattre's "Character, the Old-Fashioned Way" (August 20/August 27) could not have missed the bull's-eye any more if it tried. Granted, some moral lessons may be learned in schools. However, the majority of life lessons as well as morality should be taught in the home by responsible parents. Children these days are sent off to day care and raised by individuals who often do not hold the same values as their parents. After children reach school age, they are sent off to "Liberal Training Institutes," otherwise known as public schools. If morality and character are taught in the home by parents who care, as opposed to parents who pay someone else to take care of their responsibilities, then we will evolve back into a society that is morally responsible.

Matthew Weidman
*Middleville, MI*

Concerning William Bennett and Edwin J. Delattre's "Character, the Old-Fashioned Way," they are right that schools can't have a course on character, but they fail to mention the real way character is formed: It's taught by a two-parent family. Taught by words, just like math or history, and taught by example.

Growing up in the fifties, we all felt we needed to display "good character"

because society demanded it, and therefore our parents taught us about good character.

Almost everybody then had good character—kids, parents, athletes, politicians, employees, and employers. Sadly, that ended about 1970 when the two-parent family started to dissolve. Kids were no longer taught "good character," and 30 years later, the current state of things is what we have to show for it.

There's no good news for the immediate future. As the "good character" people slowly leave us, the "no character" people replace them in society.

Nothing the schools can do will help. Only one thing will: a cultural renaissance of the two-parent family and society's insistence that it remain intact.

If we start working on this today, we should expect to see a return of "good character" in our society around 2035.

Jim Howl
*Phoenix, AZ*

## Haunting Hamlet

Stephen Greenblatt haunted by Hamlet ("Fathers and Sons," August 20/August 27)? I think all of mankind is haunted by Hamlet. Shakespeare's classic is replayed in our lives over and over again. It's not Greenblatt's being haunted by Hamlet, but Hamlet's haunting Greenblatt. Hamlet in purgatory only reflects that mankind can't let deceased people we are influenced by go. The dead influence the living, because many of us are dependent instead of truly independent.

Robert Charles Mitchell II
*Sacramento, CA*

## False Hoax

If there were a Charles Krauthammer fan club, I would be a gold star member. That's why I was taken aback by his piece "The Great Stem Cell Hoax" (August 20/August 27). In it he repeatedly asserts the idea that "stem cells are the cure of the mid 21st century."

The hoax is the claim that only embryonic stem cells promise so much so soon.

After all, therapeutic stem cell use in bone marrow transplants has been common since the early 1990s. Umbilical cord stem cell therapy began in earnest a few years later, and now some 70 different diseases, primarily forms of leukemia, are treated with umbilical cord stem cells. Recent studies have shown that adults can benefit from umbilical cord cells as well as children, even when cells are not closely matched.

Modex Therapeutics of Switzerland is in the second of a three-phase human trial to grow skin grafts from stem cells found in hair follicles. Thirty-six patients with diabetic ulcers have already benefited, and regulatory approval could come next year.

In July, surgeons at the University of



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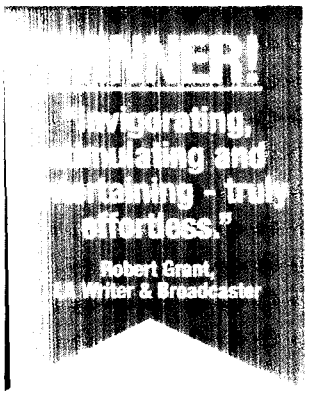


Lisa Fargo, Property Manager

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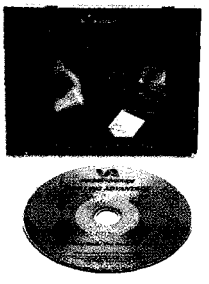

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Rostock successfully transplanted marrow stem cells into a heart attack patient. It's too early to say whether the new cells are actually building tissue, but Osiris Therapeutics in Baltimore has rebuilt cardiac tissue in damaged pig hearts (pig hearts are the closest to ours) as well as those of rodents. They hope to begin human trials this year.

Do No Harm, a D.C.-based coalition that opposes use of embryonic stem cells, notes over 30 different anti-cancer uses for adult stem cells, all tested on humans and all appearing in peer-reviewed medical literature. Further, Do No Harm lists about 100 non-embryonic stem cell experiments on animals that have shown success against every disease Krauthammer names, including Parkinson's, diabetes, Alzheimer's, paralysis, and many more. Lab animal physiology isn't so different from our own as to assume that many of these results won't translate into results for humans.

Krauthammer is correct to point out that the history of medical research is a history of hype. Who can forget the "War on Cancer"? Those who claim that stem cell therapy can "end human suffering" are as cracked as any utopian.

On the other hand, balding and impotency remedies were snake oil for thousands of years. Now there exist FDA-approved medicines for these ailments. I predict that some of the wonderful stem cell therapies that will tremendously alleviate human suffering will receive regulatory approval for general use not in 50 years but within five.

MICHAEL FUMENTO
*The Hudson Institute*
*Washington, DC*

WILLIAM KRISTOL and THE WEEKLY STANDARD are to be commended for sustained and intelligent commentary on bioethical issues such as embryonic stem cell research and cloning. Unlike other media sources, whose coverage of and commentary on such matters are shaped by a kind of tendentious pragmatism and a relativistic ethic, THE WEEKLY STANDARD's articles on recent events and trends display a profound understanding of what is at stake here—no less than, as you have put it, using C.S. Lewis's phrase, the abolition of man.

This latter is undoubtedly a consciously sought goal of some, such as Peter Singer, who see man as but one more species, unfairly privileged, and a rather bothersome one when in the form of a disabled infant or an infirm elderly person. But it is an end not seen by the countless numbers of people who are too intellectually lazy to think about these matters in more depth than is presented them by CNN or the *Today* show.

Articles and editorials of the sort that THE WEEKLY STANDARD has been publishing invite readers to look at these issues more deeply and seriously, and so are an invaluable source of reason and truth amidst what John Paul II's *The Gospel of Life* calls the "crisis of culture, which generates skepticism in relation to the very foundations of knowledge and ethics, and which makes it increasingly difficult to grasp clearly the meaning of what man is, the meaning of his rights and duties." We are lurching toward a "post-human future," and it is so important that a journal such as yours remains an "anti-Brave-New-Worlder" voice—even if it becomes a voice in the wilderness.

MARY MCDEVITT
*Redwood City, CA*

MY SPECIAL THANKS TO William Kristol for his editorial "Stemming the Tide" (August 20/August 27). Kristol references the lack of consideration of the in vitro fertilization role in the entire embryonic stem cell discussion. As he does, I ask where the pro-life groups are. No matter the hue and cry, this is at the root of any discussion, and hopefully Leon Kass and his oversight panel will address this indispensable part of the stem cell debate.

FRANCES WAUCK
*Park Ridge, IL*

## FIERY INSIGHTS

A FISTFUL OF BRAVOS to Algis Valiunas for his trenchant review of Robert and Jean Hollander's new translation of Dante's *Inferno* ("Ferocious Beauty," August 20/August 27). In the grand tradition of book reviews that look beyond the book critique narrowly conceived, Valiunas provides the reader with a consideration of the sweeping topics that Dante's *Commedia*, whole and entire, treats so beautifully. While both respectful and critical of Robert Hollander's efforts, Valiunas places Dante's work in the larger context of Western cultural ideas. I particularly enjoyed his citation from Nietzsche—one of Dante's most vociferous critics—and how that citation so fittingly describes the great intellectual divide that reading the *Commedia* evokes.

As a high school literature teacher who's been teaching Dante for 17 years, I shall eagerly encourage my students to read this review of the Hollander translation we'll be using this term.

FATHER GREGORY SCHWEERS
*Irving, TX*

## OVERSEXED

I FOUND THE ARTICLE by Andrew Ferguson on David Satcher and sex education one of the best I have ever read ("Sex Talk," August 6), but I was taken aback by one assertion: that no studies show that sex education increases sexual activity in exposed children.

Where in heaven's name did the researchers get their control group?

Children today are so saturated with "informal" sex education—from the television show *Friends* to JC Penney jeans ads—that the bit of formal "sexuality education" they get in school is so insignificant it is no wonder it doesn't register as statistically significant. If, however, you compare these kids with kids of a generation, or perhaps two, ago—before society was so sex-soaked—you might have a meaningful comparison. And I assure you that there *has* been an increase in sexual activity and a decrease in the age at which it starts.

BARBARA HARTY-GOLDER
*Sarasota, FL*

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the weekly Standard

# Who's in Charge?

We will adjudicate who's at fault in a moment. We will begin, instead, simply by noting that today, nearly eight months after Inauguration Day, it remains unclear whether the "Bush administration" actually warrants that designation. The president's Social Security Administration has no commissioner. His Food and Drug Administration and National Institutes of Health have no directors. And his cabinet departments are vacant at the top in dozens of offices that are responsible for much of the daily work of our government. Throughout the executive branch, fewer than half the senior-most "political" positions have so far been filled.

Those Republicans who've bothered to note the problem blame Democrats for the glacial pace of presidential appointments. In several particulars, the complaint is just. Two cabinet-level posts still languish empty, despite the fact that President Bush months ago formally nominated an excellent man to serve in each of them. Neither has been granted a confirmation hearing by Senate Democrats.

United Nations ambassador-designate John D. Negroponte is matchlessly qualified for the job. Over the course of a 37-year foreign service career, he ran three overseas embassies and an entire State Department bureau, and did two tours of duty on the National Security Council. But he also, during the 1980s, supported the Nicaraguan "contra" insurgents then fighting to topple their country's Marxist regime. So Negroponte has been made to wait almost six months for a confirmation hearing by Senators Chris Dodd of Connecticut and John Kerry of Massachusetts, both of whom furiously opposed the contra war.

Loath to acknowledge that they have decapitated America's U.N. delegation out of ancient pique over a Reagan foreign policy, Dodd and Kerry would have us believe, instead, that the delay involves allegations that Negroponte covered up local human rights abuses while he was ambassador to Honduras from 1981 to 1985. Except that no one has produced a fly-speck of credible evidence for those allegations.

Not even a whisper of impropriety has been advanced against John P. Walters, President Bush's similarly outstanding choice to lead the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy. Here, the should-be cabinet officer's nomination is being resisted, more or less explicitly, on ideological grounds alone. We say "more or less explicitly" because the discomfort some Senate Democrats appear to have with Walters takes a peculiar, ironic twist.

As this page has previously reported ("John Walters and His Critics," May 21, 2001), a vocal handful of marijuana enthusiasts and other proponents of the right to self-stupefaction do not like the drug czar-designate. They do not like him because he has not endorsed their call to legalize possession of recreational psychoactive chemicals. So they have mischaracterized existing laws and Walters's record in order to tar him as a lock-'em-up zealot hostile to medical services for drug addicts. And they have persuaded certain people who ought to know better—the editors of the *New York Times*, for example—to adopt and amplify this smear.

No doubt your average Senate Democrat prefers to imagine himself the *Times* editorial page made flesh, and no doubt, therefore, your average Senate Democrat imagines that he's *supposed* to oppose John Walters. Trouble is, your average Senate Democrat has been supplied impossible grounds on which to do so: The "draconian" laws and "meager" drug-treatment budgets Walters gets blamed for are laws and budgets they themselves have enacted and reenacted year after year. Rather than make asses of themselves by rejecting a nominee *because he agrees with them too much*, Senate Democrats have chosen to . . . do nothing about Walters—and not explain why.

Then there's the case of Eugene Scalia, like Walters a friend or former colleague of several WEEKLY STANDARD editors, and the president's pick to be the Labor Department's chief lawyer. Scalia has his famous father's last name, which probably persuades prejudiced partisans that he's just another doctrinaire policy warrior. Which is unfair to the father and even less fair to the son. For more than a decade, Gene Scalia has made a quiet career for himself as a perfectly mainstream labor lawyer, representing defendant employers. He is universally liked and admired by attorneys who have litigated against him. Consequently, an impressive number of those attorneys have endorsed his nomination: William Robinson, current chair of the College of Labor and Employment Lawyers, for one, and Ted St. Antoine, a former senior AFL-CIO attorney and dean of the University of Michigan Law School, for another.

But. Communicants in the church of "ergonomic science" still boil with rage at Scalia for publishing devastating criticism of the hotly debated ergonomic "safety" regulations promulgated in the waning days of the Clinton administration. Largely on the basis of a single (baldly misrepresented) line from one of Scalia's essays, these ergonauts have dubbed him "the Labor Department's James



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Watt" and "the Oliver North of employee safety." And word in the newspapers is that Senator Hillary Clinton plans to join this assault—that she "wants Scalia's scalp" for helping to persuade Congress, earlier this year, to revoke her husband's questionable, eleventh-hour regulatory adventure.

That's just it, though: Both houses of Congress *did* vote to invalidate the ergonomics rules. Were Mrs. Clinton to succeed in scalping Gene Scalia, in other words, it would mean the Senate had decided to reject an executive branch nominee for his alleged unwillingness to enforce federal regulations that do not exist—the Senate itself having killed them. No close observer of Congress doubts that Scalia will eventually be allowed to assume his post at Labor; his opponents' stated rationale is frivolous and unsustainable. And their genuine motivation, that Scalia is not the man a Democratic president would have chosen, is unworthy of the implied respect it has been accorded by the Senate's refusal to schedule his confirmation hearing.

Ordinary policy disagreements are never a sufficient basis for the Senate to deny a president the subordinates he prefers. Executive appointees do not serve for life in an independent branch of government, as federal judges do. They are temporary public officials delegated temporary administrative power by the man who temporarily occupies the Oval Office. And the "ideology" these officials temporarily advance is the president's by design. The Founders fully expected that every president would surround himself with like-minded aides. In each case, Hamilton explained in *Federalist* 76, "the person ultimately appointed must be the object of his preference." The Senate's "advice and consent" authority over presidential personnel was intended only as a de minimis check against the appointment of abjectly "unfit characters," and Hamilton thought it "not very probable"—or desirable—that executive branch nominations "would often be overruled." For one thing, *Federalist* 76 predicted, senators would be reluctant to cast any such "reflection upon the judgment of the chief magistrate."

By their partisan resistance to the Negroponte, Walters, and Scalia nominations—and to a handful of others—Senate Democrats have worked to prove Mr. Hamilton naive.

Here's the thing, though. There's little reason to conclude that its treatment of this limited list of "controversial" individuals is *generally* characteristic of the Democratic Senate's response to Bush administration appointees. On the whole, evidence is scarce that ideological obstinacy in the Senate is principally to blame for the staffing gaps that litter the executive branch. Political scientists who study the confirmation process actually give this year's Senate—and the Bush White House, too—high marks for diligence and cooperation, at least by historical standards. Despite an abbreviated transition, George W. Bush has managed to make more executive nominations than had Bill Clinton at a similar point in his first year. And the Senate, now politically hostile to the president, as was not the case in 1993, has nevertheless approved a *greater* number of presidential appointees. It turns out the government's senior ranks are not so empty as they've previously been.

But they are pretty empty, just the same. Why? If "partisanship" is not the true culprit, what is?

There are plenty of sober, unbiased analysts inclined to think it's "the system," the accretion of legally mandated personnel procedures, each originally well-intentioned, that now make life so hideously difficult for any man tapped for a job with the president. Paul Light, who runs a project on presidential appointment politics at the Brookings Institution, cites the "ludicrously detailed financial disclosures" such a would-be civil servant must make. And the equally time-consuming and notoriously intrusive "Form SF86" the victim must also fill out, this one demanding that he reveal every address he's ever used and the circumstances of almost every past word or deed that might conceivably trouble his conscience.

Then there's the fact that the FBI uses all these private details to conduct a "full-field" background investigation of the prospective nominee: knocking on his neighbors' doors, questioning his old girlfriends, and so forth. And the additional fact that the FBI must subject an ever growing number of people to just this level of painstaking scrutiny: 500 executive branch positions are now governed by these rules, so 500 such inquisitions must be completed before each new administration is fully staffed up.

Mr. Light of Brookings proposes that the entire process be sweepingly reformed and streamlined. And his proposal surely has great merit—on humanitarian grounds alone.

But we doubt it will fix the larger problem that here concerns us. That every prospective presidential appointee must begin a slow walk through hell the moment the White House settles on his name does not explain why President Bush hasn't yet got even that far—hasn't so much as announced a candidate—for nearly 30 percent of those 500 senior jobs he needs to fill. Nor does "the system" explain why the Senate has dithered over so many candidates who've already completed its rigors. At last count, 282 final, FBI-approved Bush nominations have reached Capitol Hill this year. And 20 percent of those haven't so far won even preliminary Senate consideration.

If they cared to, both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue could speed things up a lot. That they seem not to care enough, and that so few people in Washington are vigorously complaining about it, betrays an unsettling erosion of respect among the country's political leaders for the mechanisms of government they are charged to keep oiled and functioning. "The institution of delegated power," Hamilton wrote of the presidential appointment power, "implies that there is a portion of virtue and honor among mankind, which may be a reasonable foundation of confidence." The "institution" does indeed imply that. But it falls to our working politicians to make the implication reality.

*—David Tell, for the Editors*



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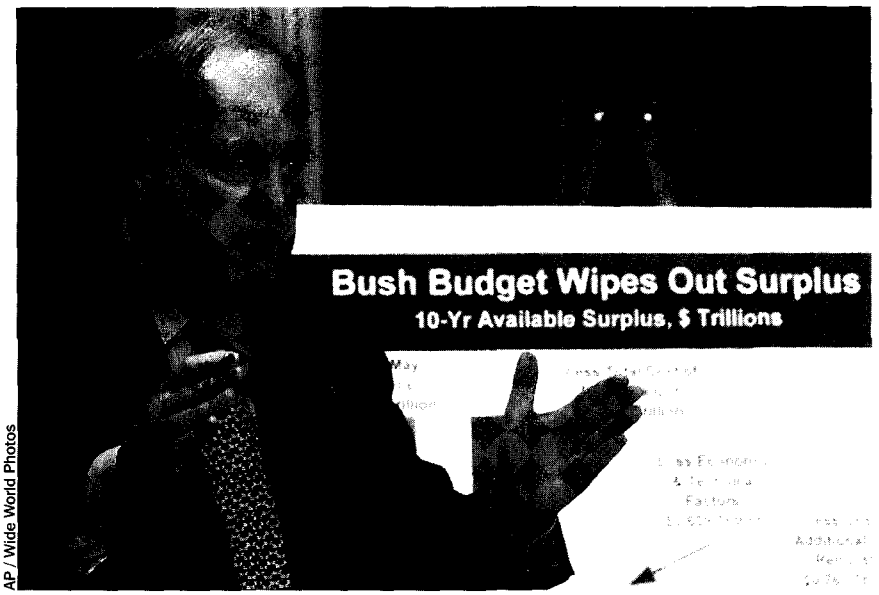
# The New Stupid Party

## The Gephardt Democrats' slow, Social Security-induced suicide. BY DAVID BROOKS




AP / Wide World Photos

*Rep. John Spratt, bashing the Bush budget.*

LONG AGO, the Republican party was nicknamed the Stupid Party, and at times Republicans have done their best to live up to the label. But after the past week, it is perhaps time to acknowledge that when it comes to brainless, self-destructive behavior, the Democratic party has achieved a level of excellence that will be unsurpassed in our lifetime.

Last week the Congressional Budget Office came out with a budget forecast. The report immediately got submerged in a chatterstorm about whether Congress or the White House would dip into something called the Social Security trust fund, but the essential facts are these: The CBO economists estimated that the federal government will run a surplus of about $150 billion in 2001. That's a lower surplus than the CBO estimated a few months ago, before the economic slowdown, the Bush tax cut, and the recent congressional spending splurge. But even in these adverse circumstances, the surplus is still projected to grow to about $200 billion a year in 2004 and close to $300 billion a year by 2006.

The Democratic party proceeded to work itself up into a collective aneurysm. Dick Gephardt—who, when given the chance to play the demagogue, never goes halfway—said that the United States now faces "an alarming fiscal crisis." Democratic national chairman Terry McAuliffe said on *Face the Nation* that it had taken Bill Clinton eight years to build up the surplus, but Bush was able to "blow it in eight months." Other Democrats rose up en masse to declare that the Bush administration was going to bankrupt Social Security/the federal government/western civilization because the administration was going to have to "raid the Social Security trust fund."

Now the press, which loves a crisis, no matter how bogus, played along. The graphic artists at *USA Today* ran a front page chart purporting to show that the federal surplus is now gone. It was left to a few more sophisticated writers, like former Clinton Office of Management and Budget staffer Matthew Miller, to remind everyone that the trust fund is an accounting fiction. When the government takes in surplus money, it doesn't matter whether you call it a Social Security surplus or a Medicare surplus or a beer bash trust fund, it all gets used the same way: to pay down outstanding debt. What matters, as far as the economy or the federal government's long-term solvency is concerned, is the government's *total* indebtedness. By that perspective, especially compared with the budgets of the past 20 years, America's fiscal house is in pretty decent shape.

One could have a rational argument about all of this. Bush critics could point out that in the years before the first baby boomer retirements, you want to see the government retiring as much debt as possible. Bush defenders could then respond that in shaky economic times, you want to stimulate the economy with a tax cut, even if it means lower surpluses in the short term, because a revived economy will eventually produce more revenue. The critics could then come back by pointing out that the Bush tax cut is poorly designed for that sort of stimulus.

But that would be a reasonable debate.

Suffering from Post-Florida Stress Disorder, the leaders of the Democratic party are in no condition for that sort of dialogue. They apparently feel some need to prove that Bush is evil and that his tax cut is the worst crime perpetrated this side of Jack the Ripper. So the Democrats launched a war of bar charts, all designed to show that the Bush administration had

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blown the deficit in a flurry of greed.

If you closed your eyes last week and listened to the hysterical charges coming from Democratic mouths, and to the sound of the shuffling press conference props, you might have thought that Ross Perot had taken over the Democratic party. But even if he was a little wacky, Perot at least hyperventilated about deficits when the U.S. government was actually running them. Dick Gephardt et al. are hyperventilating about fiscal rectitude in a time of surpluses.

And in working themselves up into a Perotvian lather, the Democrats have emerged as rabid budget hawks. Surpluses are sacred. The higher the better. Anything that reduces the size of the surplus is an immoral money grab. The ranking Democrat on the House Budget committee, John Spratt, actually held a press conference in which he said that the purpose of the budget process is to keep the fiscal balances of the country healthy. The party that once believed that the purpose of government is to help people now believes that the purpose of the people is to help the government hoard cash. The party that once believed in Keynesian pump-priming has now signed on to an agenda that includes building up massive surpluses during a possible recession.

But the transformation goes deeper. This is a party that once believed in activist government. Now, in full Perot mode, it has transmogrified into a party that believes in green eyeshade accounting. Far from protecting the Social Security trust fund and the Medicare trust fund, the Democrats should, if they were rational, see these entitlement programs as mortal threats to everything they once held dear. Again, a little simple math. In 1970, when liberal programs were growing under both Democratic and Republican administrations, the cost of Social Security and Medicare together was equal to 3.7 percent of GDP. By 2010, the cost of these two programs is expected to be somewhere around 9 percent of GDP. By 2030, these entitlements will, if unreformed, consume about 13 percent of GDP.

In other words, these entitlement programs are growing so fast, they are consuming larger and larger shares of the federal budget. Everything liberals hold dear—education spending, anti-poverty spending, subsidies for offensive art—is being subjected to a steady squeeze by these rapacious entitlements. When entitlement spending rises, discretionary spending, as a percentage of the total budget and the total economy, shrinks. Again, beyond the bogus tempest about dipping into the Social Security trust fund, the CBO report contained the essential data: Non-defense discretionary spending as a percentage of GDP is now at the same level it was in the early '60s. By the end of the decade, the CBO economists project it will constitute the same share of the economy as it did before World War II. And this comes after a few years of relatively generous spending, when discretionary programs grew much faster than the inflation rate.

Thus we confront the liberal nightmare. Over the next 40 years, as the baby boomers retire, entitlement spending surges. There is scarce money left over for any new government programs. Discretionary spending shrinks and shrinks in significance. The government becomes nothing more than a big check-writing machine, which is so boring that pundits will have to sit around hoping Gary Condit's grandchild runs for Congress so they will have something to talk about.

Republicans of a libertarian bent can feel relatively sanguine about this scenario. Milton Friedman predicted it several decades ago. A government that does nothing but send out entitlement checks is relatively benign. But Democrats should be horrified by the prospect. This is a world in which liberalism ceases to be a progressive force. Unable to launch new initiatives, Democrats will sit around in their musty studies with portraits of Harry Hopkins on the wall and blunderbusses on their knees, in case anybody ever mentions Social Security reform.

A few smart liberals have shot off warning flares. Robert Kuttner wondered in the *Washington Post* why the spirit of Calvin Coolidge seems to have taken over the Democratic party. In the *Los Angeles Times*, Robert Reich wrote a piece called "Democrats are Falling Into the Austerity Trap." But these liberal voices did not move the party elites. And this revealed a striking intellectual hollowness at the core of the Gephardt/McAuliffe Democratic party. It no longer cares much about using government to foster economic equality, the way FDR's or LBJ's Democratic party did. Instead, in hedgehog-like fashion, it gets its juices going for only one purpose: protecting Social Security and Medicare from the perfidious Republicans.

The Democrats are good at protecting these programs. They are good at scaring grannies about the imminent threat to that monthly check. They've got big cannons that don't move, but they are powerful. If a Republican talks about reforming Social Security, and thus ventures into the cannons' line of fire, the Democrats let him have it. If a Republican even walks down the street that leads to the driveway that goes up to the house that contains the Social Security lockbox, the Democrats fire the guns. It's the only weapon they have, they feel, so they fire it every chance they get.

But if they succeed in protecting these entitlements as currently constituted, they will end up creating a government with little money for discretionary spending and thus, with little discretion. It will be a big government but an immobilized one, unable to respond to any problem that requires spending. The just and the unjust programs will both be squeezed—defense as well as mohair subsidies.

The American people are cynical about and detached from the federal government. They may want a government with no discretion, and hence, no politics. Let's just hope nothing happens over the next four decades or so that requires a swift and active national response. ♦



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# Feeling Insecure

## Republicans may be right to fear the "third rail" of American politics. BY STEPHEN F. HAYES

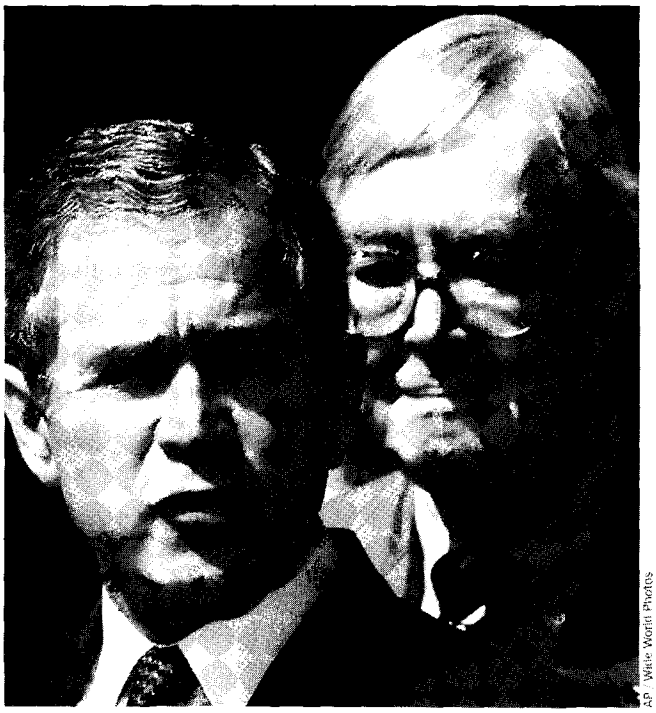
WHEN GEORGE W. BUSH embraced Social Security reform as a key issue in his presidential campaign, everyone knew it was a gamble. Sure, polls showed majorities of the public supported the concept of limited privatization. But these polls were untested in the real world of electoral politics, and they directly challenged long-entrenched conventional wisdom on the "third rail of American politics": Don't touch it.

In proposing the most radical changes to the federal retirement system in its 65-year history, candidate Bush "didn't just touch the 'third rail,'" explains Bush campaign adviser Ed Gillespie. "He grabbed it, picked it up, swung it around, and said, 'Here it is. I'm going to change it.'"

The gamble, at least in the campaign, paid off. Shortly after Bush gave a speech in which he began to lay out his general principles for reform and called for voluntary personal accounts, *Business Week* magazine dubbed him "Mr. Social Security." And on Election Day, Bush and Al Gore essentially split the senior vote. Bush advisers believe this marks the beginning of a new era of Social Security politics.

Now, in order to deliver on his campaign promises, Bush will have to fight. Congressional Democrats are expected to be hostile. But if Bush attempts any substantive changes to Social Security, he may encounter resistance from members of his own party, apprehensive about the upcoming congressional elections. The battle—on both fronts—begins in earnest this week, as a Bush-appointed commission holds its first public hearings.

Moving from abstract principles to actual proposals for changing Social Security promises to be even more hazardous than campaigning on the issue. Bush appointed a 16-member, bipartisan commission to study options and make recommendations. The group, co-chaired by longtime Democratic senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, had not yet assembled when the pile-on began. Democrats scorched Bush for having the audacity to select commissioners who, in the most general terms, agree with his position.



AP/Wide World Photos

*Bush and Moynihan, May 2, 2001.*

When the commission issued its interim report, Democrats, to use the technical term, freaked out. Not only did Bush want to bankrupt Social Security to enrich his friends on Wall Street, but the report confirmed Democrats' worst fears: Republicans pretty much hate old folks. Washington exploded with press conferences.

"What is going on here is not a mystery," House minority leader Dick Gephardt told assembled reporters. "The Republican party has always opposed Social Security and Medicare, and these latest scare tactics are part of a 66-year drive to gut Social Security and let people fend for themselves at age 65."

Not to be outdone, Senate majority leader Tom Daschle added: "Your Social Security benefits will be cut under the commission report by 41 percent, nearly one-half."

This, mind you, was the *interim* report. Bush advisers say such demagoguery didn't work in the campaign, and it won't work now.

"Democrats will say all sorts of ungodly things about Republicans and Social Security," says Gillespie. "That's the way it has always been and probably always will be. We run on Social Security every two years whether we like the issue or not. We're much better off trying to do it on our own terms."

Dan Allen, a spokesman for the National Republican Senatorial Committee, says that Democrats must offer solutions, not just criticism. "They've got a seat at the table, now that they're in the majority in the Senate," he argues. "And on issue after issue—and Social Security is one of the biggest—they've done nothing but attack. They've offered no solutions."

But some Bush advisers are con-

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cerned that an attacks-only strategy might work for the Democrats. They worry that Democrats are gearing up for a "What crisis?" campaign modeled on the one conservatives mounted to defeat HillaryCare in 1993. At least two left-wing policy groups—the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and the Century Foundation—stand ready to launch studies and monographs in the next month making just that case.

"If the other side can convince people that there's no crisis, then what are we doing this for?" asks one Bush adviser working with the commission. "It'll be very, very tough to do this politically if people can be convinced that there's no crisis."

These worries, and a different read on last November's results, have some conservative activists and congressional Republicans doubting the Bush approach. Several GOP post-election analyses, including one by strategist Jeffrey Bell that appeared in this magazine, suggest Gore's emphasis on Social Security in the campaign's final weeks shifted large numbers of previously undecided voters his way.

"Bush was courageous to embrace Social Security reform," says Bell. "But there are strong signs that Gore's ads on Social Security were effective in moving people, first in the swing states, then nationally."

Several Bush advisers are recommending a sustained, aggressive campaign—beginning with the hearings this week—to define the issue and shape public perceptions of the commission. Eventually, such an effort would include national ad buys, extensive use of Sen. Moynihan, and possibly a prime-time speech on the issue by President Bush.

"If we fight to a draw among seniors and near-seniors, and manage the issue properly, we can generate enthusiastic support—maybe even turn out new voters—in 2002," says Charlie Black, a Bush campaign adviser. "Democrats have always thought that this was a bread-and-butter issue for them. They might not know it yet, but they could be playing with fire, too." ♦

# Made-Up Massacre

## The Tantura affair, in which post-Zionist Israel libels its own past. BY MEYRAV WURMSER

SHORTLY AFTER KOSOVO leapt into the headlines worldwide and war crimes became the international subject of the hour, the Palestine Liberation Organization, ever quick to exploit political trends, set about likening Israel to Serbia. Spokesmen for the Palestinian cause demanded that the international community bomb Israel and ostracize and pursue its leaders, as it had Serbia and Slobodan Milosevic. They soon got help from an unexpected quarter: Far-left Israeli historians answered the call to elaborate the comparison. Before long, their effort to tarnish their nation had precipitated a major scandal in Israeli historiography known as the Tantura affair.

The stakes were clear: In the current climate of concern about war crimes, to tar Israel with atrocities—especially atrocities in its war of independence in 1948—would be deadly. The Serbs, after all, were in the dock for crimes committed in pursuit of empire. Once Serbia changes its behavior, it will rejoin the community of nations. But to show that Israel was born in sin, that the very act of its creation was a crime, would be to discredit the Jewish state once and for all.

The problem was, the postmodernist, "post-Zionist" historians lacked the raw facts from which to make the comparison—until, conveniently, a master's thesis produced at Haifa University provided them with useful fodder. Written by a graduate student named Teddi Katz, this thesis addressed a delicate topic: the evacuation of Arab villages at the foot of southern Mount Carmel during the war of independence. Katz maintained that the Israel Defense Forces had killed more than 200 unarmed inhabitants of the Arab fishing village of Tantura on May 22-23, 1948, after the village had surrendered. It was an astonishing assertion. No massacre had previously been recorded in Tantura; indeed, no massacre of such magnitude had been recorded in all of Israeli history.

The story gained prominence after Katz, awarded the unusually high grade of 97 for his research, spoke to a reporter, who published an account of the Tantura massacre in the leading Israeli newspaper *Ma'ariv* on January 21, 2000. Astonished veterans of the Israeli Alexandroni Brigade, the unit that had taken the village, sued Katz for libel, denying his account and asserting he had fabricated evidence. Leading figures in the Israeli peace camp made Katz's defense their fund-raising cause du jour.

The trial took place in Tel Aviv in December 2000. After two days' cross-examination in court, Katz signed a statement that nullified his research. "After checking and re-checking the evidence," it read, "it is clear to me now, beyond any doubt, that there is no basis whatsoever for the allegation that the Alexandroni Brigade, or any other fighting unit of the Jewish forces, committed killing of people in Tantura after the village surrendered."

No wonder Katz admitted this. The trial had abundantly exposed the flimsiness or nonexistence of his evidence. To cite just two examples, Katz had quoted a surviving Arab villager, Abu Fahmi 'Ali Daqnash, as saying that after the surrender of the village, Israeli soldiers had "often shot, killed,

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ADVERTISEMENT

# "An American Amazon"

I visited the Old Lady, who lived in a shoe. She had so many children she didn't know what to do! She knew all about girls what with so many daughters.

"Girls in the armed forces, Ma'am," I began. "Any thoughts?"

"Men fight wars, among other reasons, for their girls and wives back home. Correct?" She asked.

"For sure," I answered. "Girls fighting alongside boys are a distraction and vice versa. It makes it difficult for either sex to keep their minds on their business. I think, Ma'am."

"You have a point, especially if the girl, or boy is charming and attractive," she replied.

"What scares me," I continued, "is lots of boys do have good manners. Imagine having to 'go over the top' on a desperate raid. The boy says to the girl next to him, 'After you. Ladies first!' How about that?"

"Well, my boy, if you ask me that's what happens when liberal do-gooders start telling West Point generals what to do. You know the kind," the Old Lady said.

"You know what else," I told her. "No more pinups to inspire the boys, to remind them what awaits them back home, to get the war over in a hurry. What's the need for lovely pinups if the ranks are filled with pretty girls already all around the boys? Hear Hollywood scream. Watch Bob Hope tear his hair out. No need for pretty girls to entertain the soldier boys."

"And," the Old Lady wondered, "how many courteous boys will pay for their courtesy with a sniper's bullet? Why? Because, through force of habit, a polite soldier boy will not just salute an approaching female officer, he'll stand up too. Then he'll catch a bullet," she exclaimed.

"Possible," I agreed.

"It's enough for me to keep my girls at home in this old shoe," said the Old Lady. "Limit them to the home-front. My girls are as brave and useful as any soldier on the battlefront!"

"I think so," I assured her.

"Where has my darling daughter gone? Off to fight some bloody war, my gentle U.S. amazon," mumbled the Old Lady in the shoe.

"What did you just say? I couldn't make it out," I told her.

"Never mind, young man. It's just between us girls," she almost whispered. And that was it.

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and wounded people." And he had quoted another villager, Abu Riyaj Muhammad Hatzadiyah, as saying, "I know that they shot young people after the fighting and that there was a big slaughter in the village, even after everyone surrendered and stopped fighting." No such statements appeared, however, in either Katz's recordings or his notes of his interviews with the two men.


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Nevertheless, twelve hours after signing his admission, Katz formally retracted it and sought to continue the trial. When the judge refused, he appealed to the district's high court, but the appeal was dismissed without a hearing.

The prosecutor proceeded to urge Haifa University to strip Katz of his degree, whereupon the university set up two committees, one to check the accuracy of Katz's research and the other to investigate whether his work had been properly supervised. The first committee found that Katz had "gravely and severely" falsified testimony at 14 different places in his thesis. The results of the second committee's work are pending.

Nevertheless, Katz's mentor and close friend, leading post-Zionist historian Ilan Pappe, continued to defend him. In an article in the Spring 2001 issue of the *Journal of Palestine Studies*, published by the University of California, Berkeley, Pappe insisted that Katz's *conclusions* were correct, even if his facts may not have been. Katz's research was valuable regardless, Pappe wrote, since historical research need not be based on facts. Katz had understood the "murkiness" of the memories of participants so many years after traumatic events, but he "was not interested in fine details," Pappe wrote. Katz simply wished to see the overall picture, "leaving behind, perhaps forever, certainties about exact chronology and names and precise numbers."

The real story, Pappe contended, was that Israeli forces had indeed massacred a large number of Arab civilians in Tantura—as was typical, Pappe further asserted, of Israeli "ethnic cleansing" in Palestine in 1948. Katz only wished to uncover the "pain and suffering" experienced by people in the midst of war. Pappe compared Katz's work to the recording of the testimony of Jewish Holocaust survivors. Just as researchers used personal narratives to document the traumas of the Holocaust, so too, argued Pappe, did Katz use testimony from Palestinians to reconstruct the horrors of the 1948 *Nakba*, or "disaster," as Palestinians call it, even though the individual tales might not have been true.

Pappe construes the uproar over the Tantura case as a byproduct of the failure of the peace process: Hardening attitudes in Israel have silenced the nation's conscience. Pappe maintains that "poor" Katz's problem was simply his timing. Had his work been completed in the optimistic days of the Oslo process, public and academic reactions would have been entirely different.

But far from being a mere accident of timing, the Tantura affair betrays a problem of genuine gravity. Post-Zionist historians now accept admitted falsehoods as historical evidence. Not only in political discussion but even in scholarship, truth has become relative. Everyone has his own "narrative." The line between subjective and objective, between fiction and fact, has been blurred, if not obliterated. All academic standards are bent to demonstrate the unjust and immoral nature of Zionism and of the state of Israel. Post-Zionist historians, who proudly style themselves slayers of the propagandistic "myths" of Israel's creation and witnesses of truth, are actually the opposite: falsifiers of facts, for which they substitute a new mythology.

The disease, moreover, is not confined to academia. Postmodernism now infects diplomacy. Former Israeli minister Yossi Beilin, who was an architect of Oslo and top Israeli negotiator, was quoted by the *New York Times*'s Deborah Sontag in July as stating that a deal over Palestinians' Right of Return to their 1948 homes in Israel could have been struck last January had the two sides succeeded in their efforts to establish "an 'agreed narrative' that would defuse the situation." For Katz and Pappe, it seems, all means are justified in the struggle to defame Zionism and Israel. But even for Beilin, truth is negotiable, and the record of Israel's history can be traded in order to reach a deal. ♦



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# Faith No More?

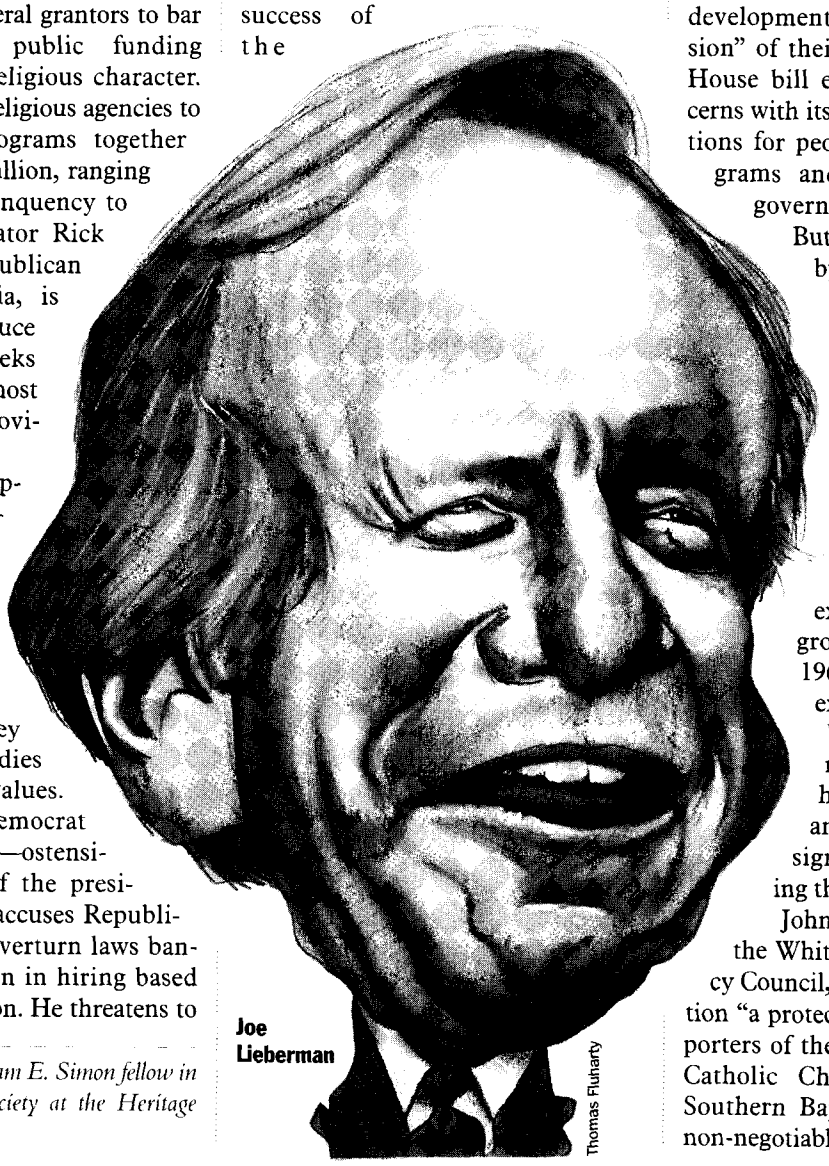
## The president's signature initiative enters the maw of the U.S. Senate. BY JOE LOCONTE

PRESIDENT BUSH'S PLAN to expand the role of religious charities in providing social services got a boost with the passage of House legislation in July endorsing much of his agenda. But it faces a ferocious battle in the Senate, where Democrats are objecting to provisions allowing faith-based groups to hire only those who share their religious beliefs.

The House legislation would make it unlawful for federal grantors to bar providers from public funding because of their religious character. That could allow religious agencies to participate in programs together worth about $53 billion, ranging from juvenile delinquency to job training. Senator Rick Santorum, a Republican from Pennsylvania, is expected to introduce a bill in a few weeks that will embrace most of the House provisions.

The plan's supporters want language guaranteeing faith-based organizations control over employment decisions; it is an agency's staff, they argue, that embodies its mission and values. But Senate Democrat Joseph Lieberman—ostensibly a supporter of the president's initiative—accuses Republicans of trying to overturn laws banning discrimination in hiring based on sexual orientation. He threatens to write his own legislation, while Senate majority leader Tom Daschle says a vote on the measure may be postponed until next year.

The stakes are indeed high. The president considers his faith-based initiative the crown jewel of his domestic agenda. But his plan might collapse if he approves a bill forcing the nation's good Samaritans to secularize themselves in exchange for federal money. "The success of the faith-based initiative is on the table," says Greg Baylor of the Christian Legal Society, "and it turns on this issue of religious autonomy."



Joe Lieberman

Thomas Fluharty

Democrats, however, might lose by winning. If they abridge the rights of church-based ministries or quash the legislation altogether, they could confirm the perception of their party as a haven for anti-religious activists. Warns Georgia Democrat Zell Miller: "If this bill is defeated, if the Senate Democrats are responsible for stopping it, I think it would go a long way toward turning that perception into reality."

Santorum will model his bill on the 1996 "charitable choice" law, which allows charities receiving federal grants to control the "definition, development, practice and expression" of their religious beliefs. The House bill eased church-state concerns with its carefully crafted protections for people in faith-based programs and prohibitions against government-funded religion. But it stirred a fierce debate by allowing organizations to use religion as a factor for employment.

Federal civil rights legislation—though banning discrimination on many grounds, including race, sex, national origin, and religion—has always carved out exemptions for religious groups. Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, for example, permits faith-based institutions to use religion as a criterion in hiring. Congress passed, and President Clinton signed, four laws containing this Title VII provision.

John Bridgeland, director of the White House Domestic Policy Council, calls the federal exemption "a protected civil right." To supporters of the president's plan, from Catholic Charities U.S.A. to the Southern Baptist Convention, it is non-negotiable. Warns Rep. Joe Pitts,

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another Pennsylvania Republican, who helped guide passage of the House bill: "Anything less than maintaining current civil rights protections for religious employers is really not worth passing."

Opponents say government must not endorse any form of discrimination; religious groups getting public money should play by the same rules as secular providers. And those rules are multiplying rapidly: In recent years, states and localities have passed hundreds of ordinances to ban discrimination in hiring based on sexual orientation—without necessarily exempting religious agencies.

These ordinances are becoming a federal issue because federal grants get mixed in with state and local money, raising questions about which anti-discrimination laws apply. House Republicans saw to it that under their bill, federal law would preempt local anti-discrimination statutes when federal money flowed to faith-based groups. A coalition of congressmen and conservative groups warned the White House in August they would "strongly oppose" a measure without such protection.

Lieberman, joined by numerous civil rights groups, insists this preemption language be dropped. He accuses the Bush administration of being "out of step with the core values of most Americans" by preparing to "throw out fundamental civil rights protections." He's not likely to back down: In July he introduced the Employment Non-Discrimination Act to ban discrimination in hiring based on sexual orientation. The bill is already under fire for offering insufficient protections to religious organizations.

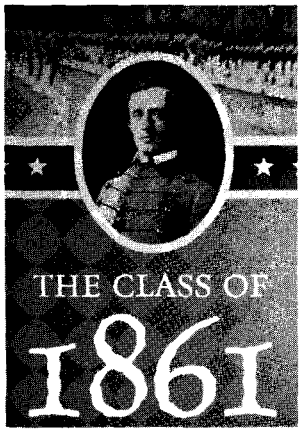
Indeed, it is beginning to look as though Lieberman and his liberal allies may be the ones drifting from the political mainstream. Members of his own party argue that although Americans frown on discrimination, most view the independence of religious groups as sacrosanct. Democrat Tony Hall, for example, cosponsored the House faith-based bill and fought to keep the employment protection for religious charities. Zell Miller worries that partisan posturing threatens to block inclusion of faith-based organizations in public efforts to help the poor. "It was a good idea when Democrats were proposing it," said Miller in a dear-colleague letter, "and it is still a good idea now that President Bush is proposing it."

Others agree. Former Democratic congressman Andrew Young—a confidant of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.—calls the contested civil rights provisions "virtually identical" to those already approved by Democrats. "No force in our society has served more effectively than our nation's many and varied traditions of faith," he wrote recently in the *Wall Street Journal*. "They should not be locked out of applying for government funding."

Such criticism hints at a deeper problem for Democrats. Senator Evan Bayh, the Indiana Democrat who currently heads the centrist Democratic Leadership Council, says his colleagues' indifference to religious concerns is making churchgoers uncomfortable in their party. "Many middle-class Americans wonder if Democrats are condescending, cultural elitists who can't relate to people like them," he told a recent DLC gathering. "We have a credibility problem when it comes to values."

Bush badly wants a bill to keep his initiative alive, but conservatives say he will have his own credibility problems if he signs legislation that leaves faith-based groups vulnerable to the secular state. Is there a clean compromise in sight?

There is talk of introducing a minimalist version of the charitable choice law, retaining the federal hiring protection for religious organizations but leaving unsettled the issue of local anti-discrimination rules. Forces on both sides will find reasons to dislike it. ♦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# Eurojustice

## *An exercise in posing and preening*

**By Jeremy Rabkin**

It has been a busy summer for European diplomats and for the human rights activists who dance to the Euro-beat. They have been much exercised about dangers to global stability. The main danger, they seem to think, comes from the United States.

Europeans want to stop global warming and stand up for global justice. So do the globalist non-governmental organizations, or NGOs, who are their moaning bass accompanists. But the Bush administration has said no to the Kyoto Protocol and no to the International Criminal Court. The Bush administration is even pressing ahead with plans for a missile defense system. But that means—national defense! Europeans don't like to think about national defense. They don't even like to think about nations. They prefer to think about "peace."

So European governments and advocacy groups have been protesting U.S. "obstructionism" and also griping about the death penalty in the United States. And they have been grimacing at Washington's ally, Israel. In recent months, Palestinian terror bombings have struck Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Jerusalem, and the toll of murdered or maimed Israeli civilians has been rising steadily. But, as the *New York Times* reported on July 28, Israel's claim to be acting in self-defense "leaves many Europeans cold." They condemn Israel for trying to kill organizers of the Palestinian terror war.

Is this a failure of imagination? Western Europeans now live in orderly, tolerant democracies. They have trouble grasping the notion that anyone would seek the indiscriminate slaughter of Jewish grandmothers, teenagers, and toddlers. It is so alien to European experience.

At least it is alien to Europe's current way of thinking, which is resolutely forward-looking. Germany now has a foreign minister from the Green party, Joschka Fischer. And Fischer is the foremost champion of a constitution for the European Union, replacing the current hodgepodge of continually adjusted treaties. A formal constitution could provide an assured position of predominance, within Europe, for its largest states, like Germany. Isn't that forward-looking?

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Foreign Minister Fischer has spent the summer laboring to negotiate a Mideast "truce" so that a "peace process" can be resumed in the Mideast. What could be more natural than brokering Mideast peace in Berlin? After all, Germany has a "special relationship" with Israel—for remote historical reasons on which it is not now necessary to dwell.

And Fischer has a special relationship with the Palestinians. In 1970, a younger Fischer, then a leftist street brawler in Germany, attended a PLO conference in Algeria, where the other delegates clamored for the destruction of the Zionist entity. Shortly thereafter, Fischer's associates in the German Left helped to organize the massacre of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics.

Well, perhaps it would be better not to dwell on that ancient history, either. The point is that the Green party is for peace and Germany is for peace and Fischer is Germany's foreign minister and the United States has stopped negotiating with Arafat but Fischer can find the way forward. Fischer secured an agreement from Arafat to stop the terror attacks back in June. Fischer himself did it then. He can do it again.

Perhaps the problem, after all, is not a failure of imagination in Europe. Perhaps it is too much imagination. There was plenty of imaginative thinking on display across Europe this summer.

Back in June, Sweden, taking its turn in the rotating presidency of the European Union, hosted a U.S.-E.U. summit, and the Swedish prime minister told reporters that the E.U. is "one of the few institutions we can develop as a balance to U.S. world domination." When world domination was threatened by Nazi Germany and then by Soviet communism, Sweden was proudly—or at least profitably—on the sidelines, a firm neutral. For the struggle against "U.S. world domination," Sweden is now eager to lead the E.U. counterforce.

This imaginative perspective is actually widely shared in Europe. A week later, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe—a broader grouping than the 15-state European Union—put in its oar. It adopted a resolution "requiring Japan and the United States of America to put a moratorium on executions in



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place without delay and to take steps to abolish the death penalty."

The reference to Japan was just a courtesy. A very extensive report, approved by the Council, condemns American practice repeatedly, continually, and obsessively but never mentions Japan. The American practice of capital punishment, according to the report, is "racist" and "discriminatory," and in 23 "documented" cases it has been imposed on innocent people. There is no explanation in the report of why U.S. courts do not recognize these abuses. The report does acknowledge that American voters support capital punishment but dismisses this fact as irrelevant in a true democracy: "In continuing this barbaric and anachronistic form of punishment . . . the United States is out of step with other democracies and international human rights standards—and, in this aspect, 'undemocratic.'"

So as Europeans see it, democracy means not government by the elected representatives of your own people, but government in accord with what most other democratic governments want and in accord with "international human rights standards"—which seems to mean the same thing. Or perhaps not quite.

Membership in the Council of Europe is supposed to be limited to full-fledged democracies, but has now been extended to Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Albania, and a whole range of other states whose democratic credentials might be a bit more questionable than those of the United States. But all of these states have agreed to abolish capital punishment—even if, in some cases, only very recently. And they have all endorsed the denunciation of the United States, because "when the state takes a life, it is sending a signal that there are situations when killing is acceptable." As Chechen rebels know, Russians simply cannot tolerate the sending of that sort of signal.

Nor can Germans. In July, Germany renewed a lawsuit against the United States in the International Court of Justice. Last year, two young thugs, convicted of murder in Arizona, had been sentenced to death. They turned out to have been born in Germany, though they had come to the United States as children. They were not advised of their right, under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, to seek legal advice from the German consul in Phoenix. Perhaps he could have told them that the Council of Europe regards capital punishment as "barbaric" and supplied German defense attorneys to argue this telling point before an American jury.

The German government took the matter to the International Court of Justice, which "ordered" Arizona to cancel the scheduled execution while its international legality was under review. Arizona ignored this "order," as Texas and Virginia had ignored "requests" from the Court in parallel cases a few years ago. The executions were duly carried out. That makes the whole dispute now just a matter of history, right?

No. The German government insisted this summer that its suit go forward as a matter of principle. This is one historical dispute that can't simply be relegated to the history books. Foreign Minister Fischer has renounced anti-American (and anti-Israel) violence. Today's Fischer is an entirely new man, a champion of peace. So he must carry on the struggle against "barbaric" American practices. And the new Germany he represents must show how different it is by standing up for the rights of German murderers.

And because the new Germany is so different, Austrians can proudly join the Germans in this struggle. Walter Schwimmer, the secretary general of the Council of Europe, so loud in his denunciations of "barbaric" America, is an Austrian politician, from the same party that ran former Nazi Kurt Waldheim for president in the 1980s (and saw him elected, after his involvement in Nazi war crimes had been well publicized). Schwimmer offered an impassioned preface to the Council's report on capital punishment in America.

"How wonderful that we forget." It was a German philosopher who said that. And so many Europeans still find Nietzsche inspiring. Truth? Reality? History? They are mere expressions of the will—whatever you want them to be.

Unless, of course, there are competing wills. All Europe may be celebrating a kind of democracy in which nations march in lock step, but most Americans have not yet grasped the provisional quality of their own elections. The idea that Europe will "require" the United States government to change American practice regarding capital punishment is, of course, a bit beyond "imaginative": You might call it comical, if you like sick humor. Today's Supreme Court probably would not allow the federal government to abolish capital punishment in the states even if Congress wanted to do so. For their part, state legislatures, especially in places like Arizona and Texas, are not highly intimidated by ultimatums handed down from Strasbourg or The Hague.

The International Court of Justice can say the United States owes damage payments to Germany for slighting its consuls. The United States will almost certainly refuse to pay. It has refused to pay previous assessments by international bodies without much consequence. (For that matter, it might also consider withholding its housekeeping contributions to the World Court, which is supposed to hear suits against the United States only when the United States has consented to be sued—a restriction that the Court simply ignored.)



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After the Hearing, Honoré Daumier

The Council of Europe threatens to revoke U.S. "observer status" at its meetings. So we may have to get our make-up notes from other "observers," like our friends in Mexico. Europeans have already contrived to vote the United States off of the U.N. Human Rights Commission—so the United States has lost the privilege of rubbing shoulders there with human rights champions like Syria, Sudan, China, and France. We have shown we can live with these blows.

But European flights of fancy can be less comical for small countries. In the fall of 1998, agitation by human rights activists led to the arrest of former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet. He was seized by British police, acting on a warrant from a Spanish judge, who sought to try Pinochet for "genocide" of political opponents. Chile's own democratic government protested, very firmly and emphatically, this assault on its sovereignty. Yes, Pinochet's military government had conducted a brutal campaign of repression in the 1970s, but it had agreed to a peaceful transition to democracy in 1989, on the understanding that no prosecutions would result from past military repression (or from left-wing terrorist crimes). This was the period when similar amnesties were smoothing the transition from Communist control in Eastern Europe and from white minority rule in South Africa.

Nevertheless, the European Parliament applauded Pinochet's arrest, and a half dozen states in Western Europe vied with each other to assert jurisdiction over the case—on the novel grounds that any country could claim "universal jurisdiction" over extreme human rights offenses, regardless of where they had been committed. The same states subsequently condemned British authorities for allowing Pinochet to return home because he was too old and sick to stand trial.

Still, Pinochet was held for a year and a half while British courts deliberated on (and finally endorsed) his extradition. Nothing of this sort had ever been attempted before—the prosecution of a former head of state by courts of a third-party state with no connection to the crimes. Human rights advocates hailed the episode as a tremendous victory for the principle of "international justice." No country in the Americas endorsed the Pinochet prosecution or the alleged principle behind it, but Europeans prided themselves on striking a blow against "dictators."

While the Pinochet precedent was celebrated throughout Europe, the new "law" it established seemed at first to be a mere one-time gesture. No one ever expected that Europeans would dare to arrest any of the henchmen of the Communist tyrants who had spilled so much blood in Europe itself. No one even expected them to act against former fascists in Spain or elsewhere in the E.U.

But human rights advocates circulated hit lists of seemingly more plausible targets for the next Pinochet prosecution. Couldn't France stir itself to go after blood-drenched tyrants from former French colonies? No, it couldn't. To the disappointment of Human Rights Watch, former Haitian dictator Baby Doc Duvalier continues his comfortable retirement in the south of France. The ex-dictator of Chad, Hissene Habre, living in exile in neighboring Senegal since his overthrow in 1990, was actually arrested by Senegal, in a case initiated by former Chadian victims or their relatives and extensively coordinated by international human rights advocates. But after intervention by Senegalese president Abdoulaye Wade, the charges were dismissed.

Human Rights Watch issued a press release warning that the "Senegalese government . . . needs to explain to the world what is going on here." The world was not very interested. Even France couldn't be bothered, though it is a partner of both Chad and Senegal in the Communauté Française and—as a founding member of the Council of



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*The Incriminating Evidence*, Honoré Daumier

Europe and current member of the U.N. Human Rights Commission—considers itself a special champion of human rights. Habre is still a free man.

Couldn't the Pinochet precedent at least be applied to a more prominent killer, one not tangled up with French client states? Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri, top lieutenant to Saddam Hussein, seemed to fit the bill. He went to Vienna for medical treatment in the summer of 1999—just as Pinochet had gone to London for medical treatment the year before. Ibrahim is alleged to have participated in the mass murder of Kurds in 1988. According to the Kurds, nearly 100,000 were killed in the space of six months. A criminal complaint was filed against Ibrahim by an alert Vienna city councilman. But the Austrian government didn't want the case. Ibrahim slipped out of the country, and Austrian authorities made no attempt to stop him. Most likely, they didn't want to risk terrorist reprisals against Austria.

In fact, in the three years since Pinochet's arrest, European states have found only six individuals worthy of prosecution under their new doctrine of "universal jurisdiction." All of them were wanted for crimes in Rwanda or Yugoslavia, where international tribunals had already been set up by the U.N. Security Council to bring war criminals to justice. Where they cannot position themselves as backups to internationally sanctioned tribunals, European governments have shown little eagerness to complicate their foreign policy or invite security risks with prosecutions of their own.

Yet they remain very attached to the idea of international justice. After a democratic movement succeeded in overthrowing Slobodan Milosevic in the fall of 2000, Europeans began demanding that Serbia hand over the deposed dictator to be tried by the International War Crimes Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, set up in The Hague in 1994. It made no difference to the Europeans that the newly elected government in Serbia—in particular the new president, a professor of constitutional law—opposed the extradition as unlawful. Similar laws prohibit Germany and Italy from extraditing their own nationals. The Serbs have proved themselves very serious about this law, which they cited in July 1914 when rejecting Austrian demands for the extradition of suspects in the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand.

Serb authorities arrested Milosevic in April 2001, but the Serbian Constitutional Court ordered that extradition not be attempted, at least until the legal obstacles were sorted out. The Serbs insisted that they would organize their own trial. After all, don't the advocates of international justice tell us that international courts are a mere back-up to national courts, which always have first claim on prosecutions of their own nationals?

Maybe, but Europe was impatient. Very impatient. Europe could not wait for Serbia to organize its own forum in which to try the former head of state, an elementary expression of national independence for a fragile new democracy. Under intense pressure from European leaders—in which the United States, to its discredit, took part—the new Serb prime minister bypassed all legal procedures in his own country and in late June hustled Milosevic off to The Hague. As expected, the governing coalition in Belgrade fragmented, with results still to be seen.

Meanwhile, the Hague tribunal won't be prepared to go to trial until some time in 2002, and it will surely have



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more trouble gathering evidence than prosecutors in Serbia. Still, it's another milestone for international justice. (Advocates of international justice were indignant when the U.S. Supreme Court allowed the trial of Mexican drug lords who had been improperly extradited to the United States in the early 1990s, but they have been silent about the Hague tribunal's bypassing of the normal extradition process to get its hands on Milosevic.)

But then, Milosevic is old news. In Brussels, the headquarters of the European Union, Eurojustice found its inevitable target: Israel. A Belgian court in late June opened hearings on criminal charges against the Israeli prime minister, Ariel Sharon. The actual charges, however, were a bit stale: that during Israel's war against the PLO in Lebanon in 1982, Defense Minister Sharon, as he then was, had allowed Lebanese Christian militias to enter Palestinian camps, where they had proceeded to massacre hundreds of civilians. An Israeli commission, dominated by Sharon's political opponents, subsequently condemned him for not having taken precautions against such violence. Not even Sharon's opponents, however, claimed that he had ordered the action or had known about it at the time. And it took place two decades ago—decades that have witnessed far more terrible violence in the Mideast and in other parts of the world.

Belgium can't forget about mass atrocities and the negligent commanders in the field who failed to prevent them? Why not look at more recent instances of far greater carnage? Nearly a million Tutsi civilians were slaughtered in Rwanda in 1994. Belgian troops were actually present in that country, part of a prior U.N. peacekeeping mission. They did not lift a finger to protect Tutsi civilians or stop the Hutu killers. Instead, they busied themselves saving white people—who were not targets of the genocide, but whose incidental deaths might have triggered demands for a larger intervention, which Europeans (along with President Clinton) were anxious to avoid.

But for Belgium to prosecute its own officials and soldiers for this terrible negligence wouldn't prove any point about international justice, since Belgian courts have always had full authority over Belgian nationals. So how about the negligence of troops from the neighboring Netherlands? They stood by in 1995 as Serb militias slaughtered some 7,000 Bosnian Muslims in Srebrenica. The Dutch were guarding Srebrenica because the U.N. had declared it a safe zone for refugees. Dutch troops betrayed the very civilians they were there to protect.

But the Dutch troops were only following orders. Could Belgian courts at least go after the men giving the orders? Not likely. The U.N. official responsible for peacekeeping forces in Bosnia at the time—as for peacekeeping in Rwanda—was Kofi Annan. These disasters did not prevent Annan's promotion to secretary general of the U.N., in which capacity he has strongly endorsed European notions about universal justice for others. It doesn't seem to occur to him that *he* might someday be indicted. His predecessor, Kurt Waldheim, served two terms as secretary general. No one imagined he would be prosecuted, even when he turned out to have been personally involved with Nazi atrocities in the Balkans during his military service in World War II.

So Ariel Sharon will probably be the only head of state or international figure of note who'll have to worry about European justice for some time. But why didn't the Belgians go after him earlier? Well, Belgium only changed its law to allow for such prosecutions in the late 1990s—in a belated gesture of solidarity with genocide victims in Rwanda. (For those who say Belgium did nothing to help Tutsi victims, the country can now proudly boast prosecutions of two minor Hutu killers in Belgian courts.) The case against Sharon was organized by Palestinian and human rights activists under the sort of weird Euro-law that permits activists to trigger criminal investigations on their own initiative. The Belgian government has even expressed regret about a prosecution involving a sitting head of state—but it has not stopped it. This is not a convenient time for a European government to stop attacks on Israel's prime minister, especially with lots of people cheering.

Despite support in many quarters for an international trial of Sharon, he is not likely to end up in a European dock. But one of his subordinates might. About the time when Belgian courts were beginning criminal inquiries into Sharon's guilt, Denmark told Israel that a former Israeli intelligence director, Carmi Gillon, would not be welcome as ambassador to Denmark. If Israel sent the man, the Danes warned, he might be arrested on the spot and prosecuted for abusive actions against Palestinians. Denmark is not known to have rejected any emissary sent by Nazi Germany or Soviet Russia—much less threatened to arrest them. But Israel is, well, a country that Europeans feel entitled to be fussy about.

And where Israel is concerned, all this posturing can have serious consequences. In mid-July, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch—both among the very loudest cheerleaders for the Pinochet prosecution and the most enthusiastic boosters of applying the Pinochet precedent to others—issued a joint statement, demanding "the



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urgent deployment of international observers to monitor Israeli and Palestinian human rights and humanitarian law violations." The only point of such a proposal is to undermine Israel's legitimacy as a sovereign state. "International observers" do not go to normal countries. They go only to countries that are candidates for international intervention.

What, after all, could it possibly mean to affirm that Palestinians, too, have committed violations of "human rights"? The Palestinian Authority runs a typical mideastern despotism, and everyone knows it. Documenting that is scarcely necessary. It is an accepted fact that most Arab states are run this way, and no one much cares. There is, for example, no outcry in Europe against Syria, one of the most repressive states in the world (whose dictator was received with full honors in Paris earlier this summer). Europe is agitated that the United States wants to maintain sanctions against Saddam Hussein, whose . . . let's call them human rights deficiencies (mass murder, poison gassing of civilians, and so on) are also well known, yet Austria can't be bothered to seize an Iraqi official responsible for 100,000 deaths. What could we possibly expect from these international observers except anti-Israel agitprop?

In the 50 years since the Geneva Conventions were adopted, the signatory states have never once held a conference to inquire about compliance with these "laws of war." In the mid-1990s, however, Arafat stirred a campaign for a global conference to look into Israeli violations of the conventions. Europeans, who had not thought to monitor compliance in all the wars in the world since 1949, decided this might, after all, be a good idea. Arafat himself called it off. But European governments were quite prepared to go along with a unique international conference with no other target than the state of Israel. The United States decided to boycott the U.N. conference on racism now under way in Durban because it is likely to become a hate-Israel festival. Europeans are not so fastidious about taking part in this effort to revive the old U.N. resolution equating Zionism and racism.

It is tempting to dismiss these antics as so much pointless posturing, a kind of counterpart in international jurisprudence of the French taste for literary deconstruction. But the Europeans actually have strong incentives to nurture political fantasy. The central political fact in contemporary Europe is the European Union. It is a fantastical construction, and its looming presence exerts continual pressure to abandon sober strategy for globalist happy talk.

The European Union now stretches from Portugal to Finland, from Ireland to Greece—embracing 15 states with little historical or cultural affinity. "Europe" is indeed so abstract that the E.U. now finds two dozen other states, from Estonia and Romania to Turkey and Malta, bidding for admission. The E.U. does not want them all, but cannot figure out a definition of "Europe" that would justify excluding any of them. At this level of abstraction, it is only a small step from "Europe" to "humanity." So on behalf of "humanity," Europe corrals these applicants into denunciations of "barbaric" practices in the United States, while delaying their entry to the E.U., where they might endanger the E.U.'s intricate system of agricultural subsidies.

Yet the European Union itself is no mere trade organization. Its central bureaucracy in Brussels has involved itself in regulating everything from recipes for sausage and beer to techniques for recycling household trash. In enforcing these regulations, the European Court of Justice claims the authority to override enactments of national parliaments and the rights guaranteed in national constitutions as interpreted by national constitutional courts. Free trade can be secured with much less intrusion. But when it comes to trade, Europeans are actually quite ambivalent about "globalization."

What is the European Union all about, then? The justification most commonly given by Europeans themselves is that "European integration" (meaning surrender of national sovereignty) is a guarantee of peace on a continent where independent states wrought so much destruction in two world wars. Listening to this line, one might think the problem in the old Europe was that a bellicose, revanchist Luxembourg was constantly invading Belgium or a militarist Portugal constantly launching surprise attacks against France and Italy.

The problem, of course, was Germany, but to say this would be rude to the Germans, who are full partners in the enterprise. Then, too, it might trigger awkward questions about whether an ever tighter "integration" of European states is really a way of constraining Germany or of accommodating the age-old German dream of dominating the European continent. So today's Europeans are addicted to abstract thinking that treats the past as another world, too remote to recall without recourse to scholarly tomes.

European integration has moved forward on the assumption that the basic elements of sovereignty can be readily disaggregated, then reassembled in whatever arrangement seems most politically palatable at the moment. The European Union has been described, with much reason, as a "postmodern polity." So organs of the European Union are given final say over such small matters as constitutional safeguards for individual rights. (Or



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Three Lawyers Conversing, Honoré Daumier

is it the Council of Europe, with its Court of Human Rights, that has final say? Never mind, it's a small matter, anyway.) When it comes to armies and police, however, the European Union is out of the picture entirely.

Europeans are anxious to have an International Criminal Court, but they don't have a *European* criminal court. The latter might feed demands for a European police force and a European criminal code, and most Europeans don't have the stomach for that level of integration. But an International Criminal Court feeds nothing but NGO fantasies. Not even Europeans imagine that the ICC's independent prosecutor should be equipped with an independent police force, actually enabling the ICC to make its own arrests.

So, too, Europeans are boosters of international peacekeeping, but they don't yet have a European army. It would be especially hard for them to develop a serious European military force, because the member states couldn't agree on how to deploy it. Some are pledged to the NATO alliance, for example, while others (Sweden, Finland, Austria) are pledged to stay out of NATO. Britain and France have significant ties with former colonies, significant military forces of their own, and permanent seats on the U.N. Security Council. Most other member states have no temptation to play a separate, national role in world affairs and no obvious reason to follow behind the British or the French. A reunified Germany has ambitions to play a role in the world, but it prefers to see itself as speaking for "Europe," which does not always charm other member states. So "Europe" has trouble speaking with a serious voice in international affairs.

All along, the fundamental preconditions for European integration have been supplied from outside. American military force was required to beat down the Germans, to hold off the Soviets, to ensure that big strategic issues didn't have to be sorted out among otherwise divergent states of Western Europe. Now the Americans are less needed, and a postmodern polity doesn't dwell on the past. So the E.U. is developing a "common foreign and security policy"—and devoting it to the most abstract plans regarding abstract peace efforts. Serious commitments are still very difficult for the European Union, which is better at writing sausage recipes and directives for recycled trash.

But Europeans can all agree that General Pinochet must be punished. And General Sharon. They are anxious to think that justice can be done for "humanity" because "humanity" is fundamentally in agreement, so anyone can properly speak for "humanity"—and prosecute for it, too. Isn't the world heading in this direction, anyway? Aren't we all putting national differences behind us? Doesn't democracy mean marching in lock step with other democracies? Doesn't Europe now have a German foreign minister speaking for it?

Euro-thinking is mostly a nuisance for the United States. For Israel, as for other small countries, it can be a serious danger. Long before the Tutsis of Rwanda and the Bosnians of Srebrenica, Jews learned that European protection is not very reliable. That is one reason a Jewish state exists today in the Mideast. But as Europeans no longer have independent states, it irks them that a Jewish state should be making its own decisions about how to defend itself.

It clearly irks Europeans even more that Americans want to live in an independent country where the government is accountable to its own people. Europeans mutter now about prosecuting Henry Kissinger for war crimes: He was tangled up in that Pinochet business and in the Cold War and other nasty things that Swedes and Austrians would never have taken part in. Kissinger was actually served with a subpoena in Paris this summer, though probably nothing will come of that.

But Europeans find it easier to prosecute the leaders of little countries. Isn't that what "humanity" is all about? ♦



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# A Political Surgeon for the Senate GOP

*Frist in war, Frist in peace, Frist in the hearts of his countrymen?*

## By Sam Dealey

It has not been a happy year for Senate Republicans. First there was the disappointing showing in last fall's elections, when they almost lost their majority; then came the defection of Jim Jeffords, when they did lose it. Now, the announced retirement of Jesse Helms and speculation that other old lions may follow his lead make the prospect of regaining that majority next year look more complicated. If the Senate GOP is hurting, is a surgeon the answer?

Almost in inverse proportion to the fortunes of his party, the stock of Tennessee's Bill Frist, a transplant surgeon by trade, has been soaring. Just embarked on his second term after arriving in the Senate as a political novice in 1995, Frist will have a direct hand in the effort to regain the majority, as head of the National Republican Senatorial Committee. Leveraging his medical background, he has been in the thick of the big political debates of the summer, from stem cells and cloning to the patients' bill of rights. He is a favorite with the White House and is increasingly mentioned in the press as a possible successor to GOP Senate leader Trent Lott in 2002, as a replacement for Dick Cheney on the Republican ticket in 2004, and even as a potential GOP presidential candidate in 2008. The Beltway penchant for speculation notwithstanding, one thing is clear: A lot of Republicans have a lot of hope invested in Frist.

Arguably, no one from the Republican Class of 1994 has risen faster. With his victory over James Sasser that year, Frist became emblematic of the resurgent GOP—an honest-to-goodness outsider who rose from political obscurity to defeat a powerful incumbent many presumed unbeatable. The new Senate leadership touted him at every turn. Frist was given plum committee assignments in the areas of banking, the budget, and labor, health, and education. Bright, hard working, and quietly genial, he rose to the occasion.

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In January 2000, Frist gave the GOP response to Bill Clinton's State of the Union address. Following the death of Georgia's Paul Coverdell last summer, he was tapped by the Bush campaign as its Senate liaison. At the Republican National Convention, he was tasked with the unpopular job of co-refereeing the platform committee (it went off without a hitch), and he delivered the much-coveted four-minute speech just prior to George W.'s appearance. After a shoo-fly reelection campaign last fall, Frist ran unopposed for the chairmanship of the NRSC.

Frist himself is coy about his future. "My intention is to stay in the Senate for 12 years," he says. "Five years from now I have no earthly idea what I'll be doing." When his term is up in 2006, he says he plans to move home to Nashville, where his political idyll began.

The youngest of five children, Frist was born into a dignified family with deep roots in Tennessee. His great-great grandfather was a Tennessee pioneer. His grandfather was a conductor who achieved near-martyrdom when he saved a woman and her child from an oncoming train—he lost a leg in the process and later died of complications. His father was a doctor, as are his two brothers. The family wasn't fabulously wealthy until his oldest brother Tommy got to thinking about applying economies of scale to the health care business in 1968, when Frist was 16. That's when the family empire, a mega-mall of health care operations known as the Hospital Corporation of America, was born.

Frist attacked his first career with trademark single-mindedness. He graduated from Princeton and Harvard medical school. He spent his residencies at Massachusetts General in Boston, Southampton General in England, and Stanford University Medical Center, where he studied under Dr. Norm Shumway, the godfather of heart transplantation. In 1985, at age 33, he returned to Nashville to cut the ribbon as director of Vanderbilt University Medical Center's new heart and lung transplant center. He churned out papers, pricked the public's conscience regarding organ donation, and turned Vanderbilt's program into a first-rate operation. In 1992, Tennessee's Democratic gov-



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ernor, Ned Ray McWherter, tapped Frist to chair a state task force on Medicaid. His political convictions were so obscure that many thought he was a Democrat, if anything at all.

But of course he wasn't. A year later, "He came out in his scrubs and said, 'I'm thinking about running for the Senate,'" recalls Whit Ayres, his pollster in that year's race. "My first question was 'Why?' He was a god in his own world, and I couldn't figure out why he'd want to leave that exalted position to enter the world of politics."

Frist's political genesis is unclear. In the early 1970s, when he was still a Princeton undergrad, he interned for a summer in Congress. After that, it was all medicine, all the time. "To be the very best heart surgeon that I could possibly be, and transplant lung surgeon, and to run a large research lab, and to be productive—it took constant focus. And that's just where it was," Frist now says. "So I didn't pay any attention" to politics. It was "my family and my work, and that's it."

As you would expect of the owners of a large public health corporation, Frist's family had often contributed to political campaigns, Democrats and Republicans alike. (His brother Tommy, as president of HCA, had even held a fund-raiser for Jim Sasser.) Frist, though, never voted until 1988, when he was 36 years old. Just one Senate cycle later, he was off and running.

As far as official Washington was concerned, Frist might as well have been in Hyde Park, shouting to the pigeons. Sasser was an 18-year incumbent who was more concerned with his race for Senate majority leader than his reelection back home. The NRSC wasn't optimistic. The multi-candidate Republican primary had been bloody, and public polling showed Sasser holding a commanding lead. The race was relegated to "second-tier" status. But Frist ran an aggressive campaign. "I like to win," he says recalling the race. "I like to win."

Primarily this consisted of juxtaposing Sasser's liberal votes in Congress with what he had been telling the folks back home. The two didn't add up. Mild-mannered Bill Frist regularly railed against his opponent as a "bleeding heart liberal" and a "tax-and-spender." When Sasser could be bothered with the race at all, he picked up on the themes hurled at Frist during the primary—that he was a country-club Republican and a smooth-talking patsy for the evil HMOs. The Frists' HCA had merged with Columbia that same year, and many of the candidate's positions were portrayed as a windfall for the family dynasty. But 1994 was a bad year for incumbents and a bad year for Democrats.

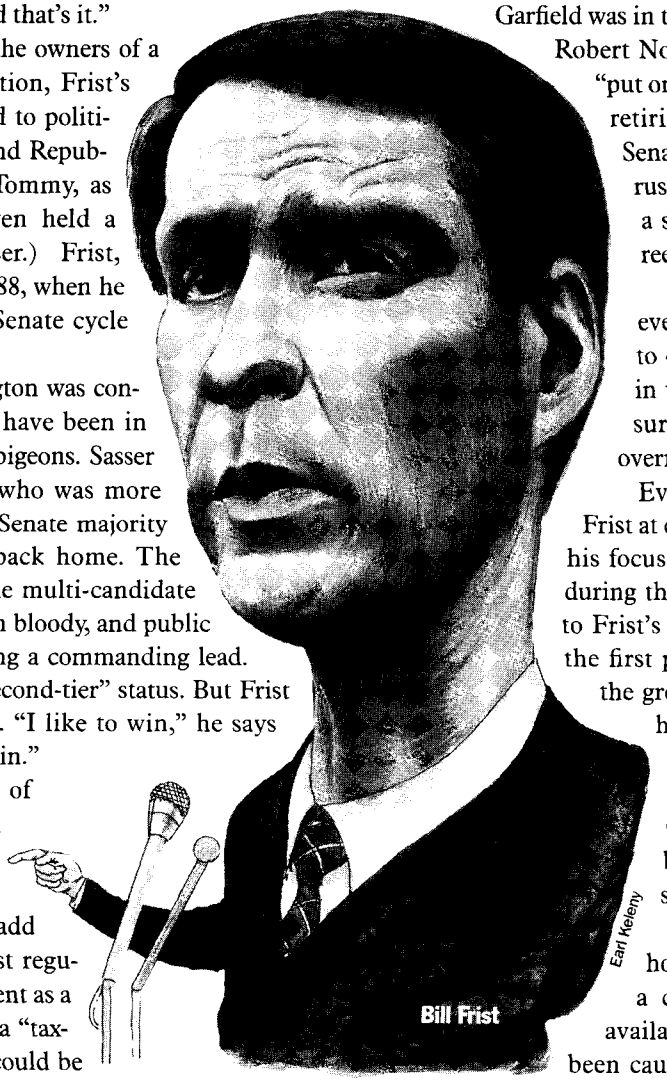
The turning point for Frist came in September, when, for the first time, an internal Ayres poll showed him ahead, 47 percent to 41 percent. Sasser's spokesman dismissed the numbers, calling Ayres a charlatan and a conjurer. "If you believe their poll numbers," he said, "you believe that Dr. Frist is a cat's best friend"—a reference to Frist's admission in his 1989 autobiography *Transplant* that during medical school, he had regularly picked up strays from the pound, befriended them for a few days, and then carved them up.

On September 22, a cartoon appeared in the *Chattanooga Times* of Garfield the cat, looking typically blasé, holding up a sign that read "Not For Frist." Evidently Garfield was in the minority; on that same day, Robert Novak reported that Sasser had "put on hold his campaign to succeed retiring Sen. George Mitchell as Senate Democratic leader and has rushed back to Tennessee to face a suddenly serious threat to his reelection."

In the end, the race wasn't even close. Frist won 56 percent to 42 percent, and took his place in the Senate. He had gone from surgeon to senator virtually overnight.

Everyone who's ever dealt with Frist at close quarters has a story about his focus. For Ayres, it's the morning during the '94 campaign when he went to Frist's home in Nashville to deliver the first poll results. Karyn Frist told the group of aides that her husband had been called out for a heart transplant the night before but was expected back shortly. Could they wait around for a bit? An hour later, Frist showed up.

During the previous 12 hours—since he'd first received a call that a donor heart was available for a patient—Frist had been caught up in a whirlwind. He'd


Earl Keleny

Bill Frist



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made calls mobilizing the patient and his medical team. He and his team had raced to a Lear jet, which in turn had raced them to a helicopter that would ferry them to the hospital where the brain-dead donor lay. He'd snipped the heart out, thrown it—carefully—into an iced red and white Igloo cooler, and choppered back to the plane, whose engines were already whining on the tarmac. A quick trip back to Vanderbilt Hospital and Frist was sawing through the sedated patient's chest, discarding the failing heart, and quickly—but carefully—stitching in the new one. Then he'd come home to meet with his handlers.

"For two-and-a-half hours he sat there looking at numbers," recalls Ayres. "And never once did he give any indication of being distracted or tired or anything of the sort." Says Tom Perdue, his 1994 campaign manager: "I think Bill has the potential to be anything he wants to be. This guy is near genius if he's not in fact genius. He has the ability to focus like nobody I've seen on one single thing, on one word even. On an airplane, in an airport, in a crowded place—this guy can lock everything out."

Of course, locking everything out may not always be politically advantageous. This June, Frist was aboard Air Force 2, ripping through the skies from Washington to an American Enterprise Institute conference in Colorado. The plane was packed with heavy hitters—the vice president, commerce secretary Don Evans, Fed chairman Alan Greenspan and his wife Andrea Mitchell, and a host of A-list senators—and everyone was chatting each other up, milking the opportunity for face time. Everyone but Frist. He was studying the instruction manual for his new BlackBerry, a two-way wireless e-mail gadget. For three and a half hours.

In a city where limelighting is considered a good day's work and aides are tasked with doing the heavy lifting, Frist's hands-on approach is legendary. Colleagues and aides say they regularly receive e-mails from him in the wee hours of the morning. He runs his office like his operating room—"calm, efficient, congenial"—and never screams. There are no tales of Frist slapping an aide, hurling pens and plants, or dallying. Even more unusual for a senator, he has a computer that appears used, and his office desk is a mess.

Frist's most tangible area of success has been at the helm of the NRSC. After last fall, chairing the Senate GOP's campaign committee wasn't exactly a job people were gunning for—and with good reason. Senate Republicans "got their clock cleaned last cycle, and [Kentucky senator Mitch] McConnell and his team were roundly criticized for not having a strategy or a focus to keeping the Senate and improving their majority," says a former national GOP official. What's more, the '02 cycle looked particularly bleak. With the Republican majority so precarious, fund-raising would be virtually a full-time job. Of the 34 seats up for reelection next year, 20 are Republican—and mid-term elections have tended to go against the sitting president's party.

Nor is Frist cut from the same cloth as his predecessors—campaign chairmen such as Phil Gramm, Al D'Amato, and Mitch McConnell. He doesn't come across as a pol's pol. "A lot of times," says Frist, "the people who sort of get through it and are successful are the hard-driving, cutthroat, pin 'em down, wipe 'em out of the way, squish 'em and move on" guys. "My style is just different." Nonetheless, it's paying off. In his first six months, the NRSC has raked in $15.4 million, $11.7 of which is hard money, the most difficult to raise. This is nearly three times what the committee raised during the first six months of the last cycle. Frist brought on Haley Barbour to chair fund-raising, and stacked the committee with able staffers. The job, says Frist, uses "skill sets that are much more [like] an executive position in terms of decision-making, in terms of building something as a team. This is the only position in the United States Senate that [requires] what I did good in medicine. I've got two years to take on a challenge which other people say is almost undoable."

But raising money is only half the job. "He needs to win some seats in 2002," says a senior GOP Senate aide. "If he doesn't, that's a bit of a smudge." Truth be told, not all the odds are against Frist. The defection of Jeffords seems to have had a galvanizing effect on Republicans. After eight years of Clinton, Bush has created an enormous amount of enthusiasm among donors. And of the Senate seats in play next year, Republican and Democratic alike, most are in states Bush carried. If Frist is able to parlay these factors into victories, the payoff for him is high. It raises his profile, puts him in contact with big-stakes donors nationwide, and racks up chits with political players of all stripes—the president, Senate colleagues, and of course those up for reelection.

What's more, should Frist's ambitions aim higher, there are Senate races next year in Iowa and New Hampshire, states with the first presidential caucuses and primary respectively, and South Carolina, the Gateway to the South, with its primary the Saturday before Super Tuesday. "Let's put it this way," says a veteran campaign strategist now with the Bush administration, "if he's successful, these candidates' supporters and activists—the grass-roots organizers, the political donors, the GOP establishment—they'll all become *his* supporters and activists." Perhaps.

Frist is often called a conservative, but his record in Congress suggests he's more patrician than anything else. He seems uncomfortable with ideological dis-



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cussion of specific issues. "It really does come back to making peoples' lives more fulfilling," he says of his credo. "That really does come down to self-worth. It comes down to integrity. It comes down to the conservative values that George W. Bush captured in his campaign: character and integrity. Those are the more conservative values. It translates to Medical Savings Accounts, individual responsibility, education, self-sufficiency."

That's pretty convoluted, if standard Frist boilerplate. "He didn't have instant opinions because he wasn't living and breathing politics," recalls Perdue, his '94 handler. "Once he started talking about public policy issues, where he always came down was on a limited form of government, on individual rights and responsibility, on limited taxes. He didn't articulate it that way, but that's where he came down." And here's Jeff Clark, Frist's Democratic opponent last fall: "I don't think he's a bad guy or anything like that. I don't think he comes out of the right-wing, fundamentalist, Christian Right, moral majority. In fact, those are terms I don't even think he knew existed" before 1994.

Frist is a conservative when it comes to issues like taxes and gun control and school vouchers, but he also supports a federal government whose role extends beyond the delivery of the mail. He voted for funding the National Endowment for the Arts. He's an internationalist, by congressional GOP standards—against setting deadlines on withdrawing U.S. troops from NATO commitments, such as in Kosovo, and for the chemical weapons treaty. He voted in favor of Clinton's controversial surgeon general nominees, Drs. David Satcher and Henry Foster, both adamantly pro-choice and the latter of whom acknowledged once performing abortions. In explaining his support for Foster, who was rejected by the Senate and by most of Frist's Republican colleagues, Frist told a reporter his background gave him special insight into the moral and ethical ambiguities of medicine. "That's why I'm in the United States Senate and, hopefully, people will see that and say, 'Gosh, they are tough issues. There are no . . . absolute right, absolute wrong answers.'"

Frist may have the mechanics of politics down pat: He may help deliver the Senate back into Republican hands next year, and perhaps even become majority leader in the process. But as for higher office, it's fair to wonder if he could survive the primary process. After all, "absolute right" and "absolute wrong" answers tend to go farther with voters than long-winded exegeses on core issues. Add to that the fact that the issues Frist clearly enjoys most—the minutiae of health care, for example—don't lend themselves to soundbites or direct mail. For a lesson in the practical effects of all of these, look no further than the recent stem cell debate.

Frist weighed in with ten "essential components" that should guide the federal government's support for stem cell research. These included banning human cloning, increasing adult stem cell research funding, and other fairly non-contentious parameters. He also wanted to further embryonic stem cell research by using for research excess embryos from in vitro fertilization procedures that would otherwise be discarded. The plan met with a resounding thud. For liberals it pandered too much to the pro-life caucus; for conservatives, it came too close to treating human embryos as Frist once treated stray cats. Many suspected Frist's proposal was a trial balloon sent up at the behest of the White House, which was publicly agonizing over the issue and taking a good deal of heat.

Both deny it up and down. "No," says Frist. "I have never ever had a substantive conversation with the president of the United States, with Josh Bolten, with Karl Rove, with Karen Hughes, or with anybody on their staff." Says a senior Bush aide, "We're not that smart." In fact, Frist's position could only have been his own. The debate is similar to the one that raged 30 years ago over heart transplantation, where the donor isn't dead: The heart's still beating and the lungs are still pumping, but the brain has stopped functioning. In his autobiography, Frist makes it clear that he believes there is a moral imperative to use one unsalvageable life to save another.

Bush ultimately came down to the right of Frist's approach to embryonic stem cell research, and pro-life groups grudgingly pronounced Bush's solution acceptable. But politically, Frist again found himself on the wrong side of social conservatives, as he had with Clinton's surgeon generals. As a national candidate, "Frist would be actively opposed by pro-life conservatives in this country," speculates Terry Jeffrey, a long-time conservative activist now with *Human Events*. "He would be defeated on that issue alone."

Maybe, maybe not. In a broader sense, it's not clear how Frist would fare as a national candidate. The very traits that have made him a favorite of the GOP establishment—his deliberate intellect, his warmth and quiet reserve, his obvious marketability as an outsider—call to mind another Tennessee favorite son, Lamar Alexander, whose track record as a national candidate is not auspicious.

Then again, Frist has only been at the game for seven years. It's hard to tell where he is on the learning curve. It's also hard to tell where his ultimate interests lie. Maybe he just doesn't have politics in his blood. "When you look to the future, people say, 'Oh, gosh, here's a guy who's doing okay, he'll stay here forever,'" says Frist. "My case is a little different. My interests are broad." Republicans are hoping they're not *too* broad. ♦



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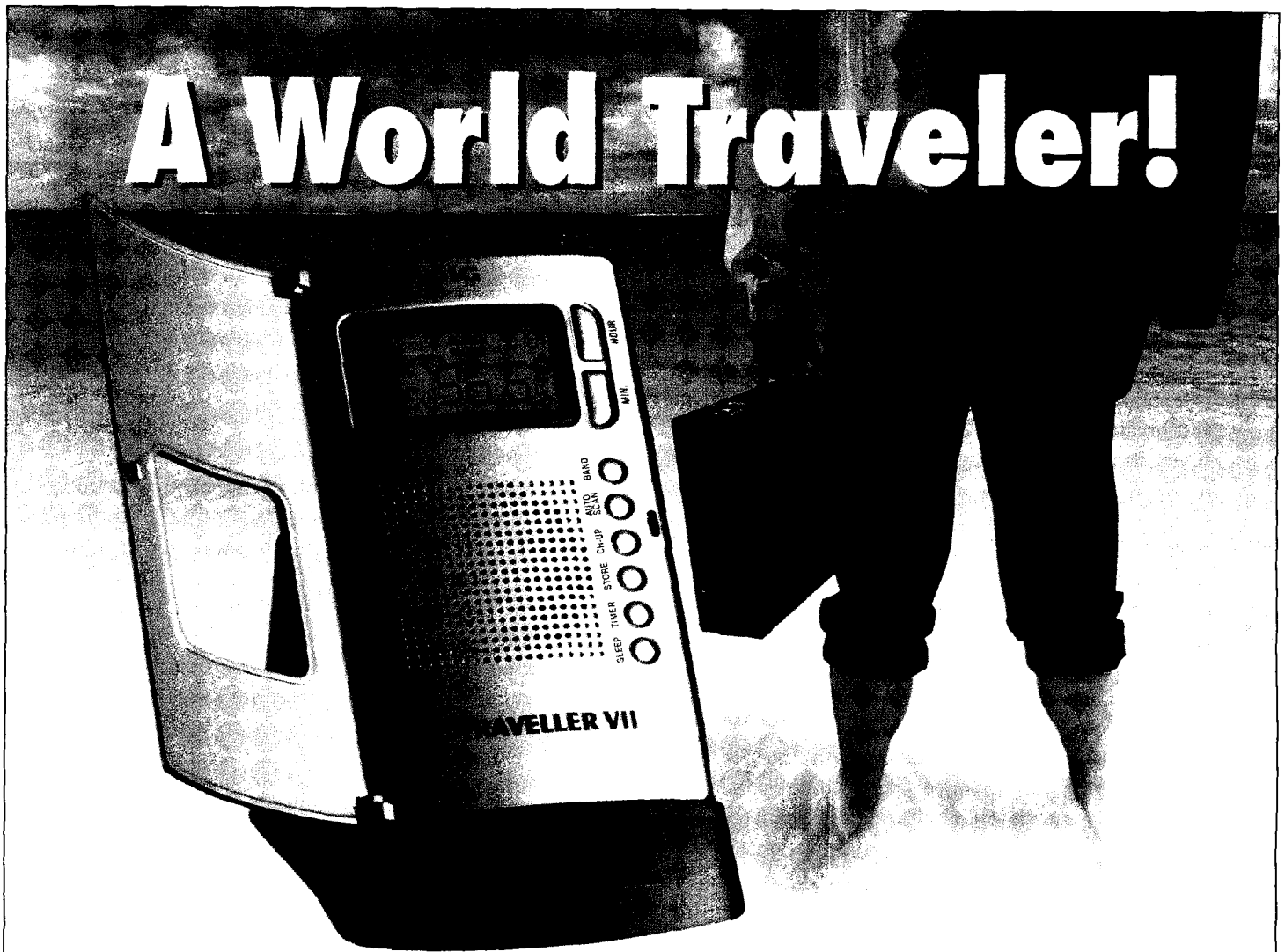


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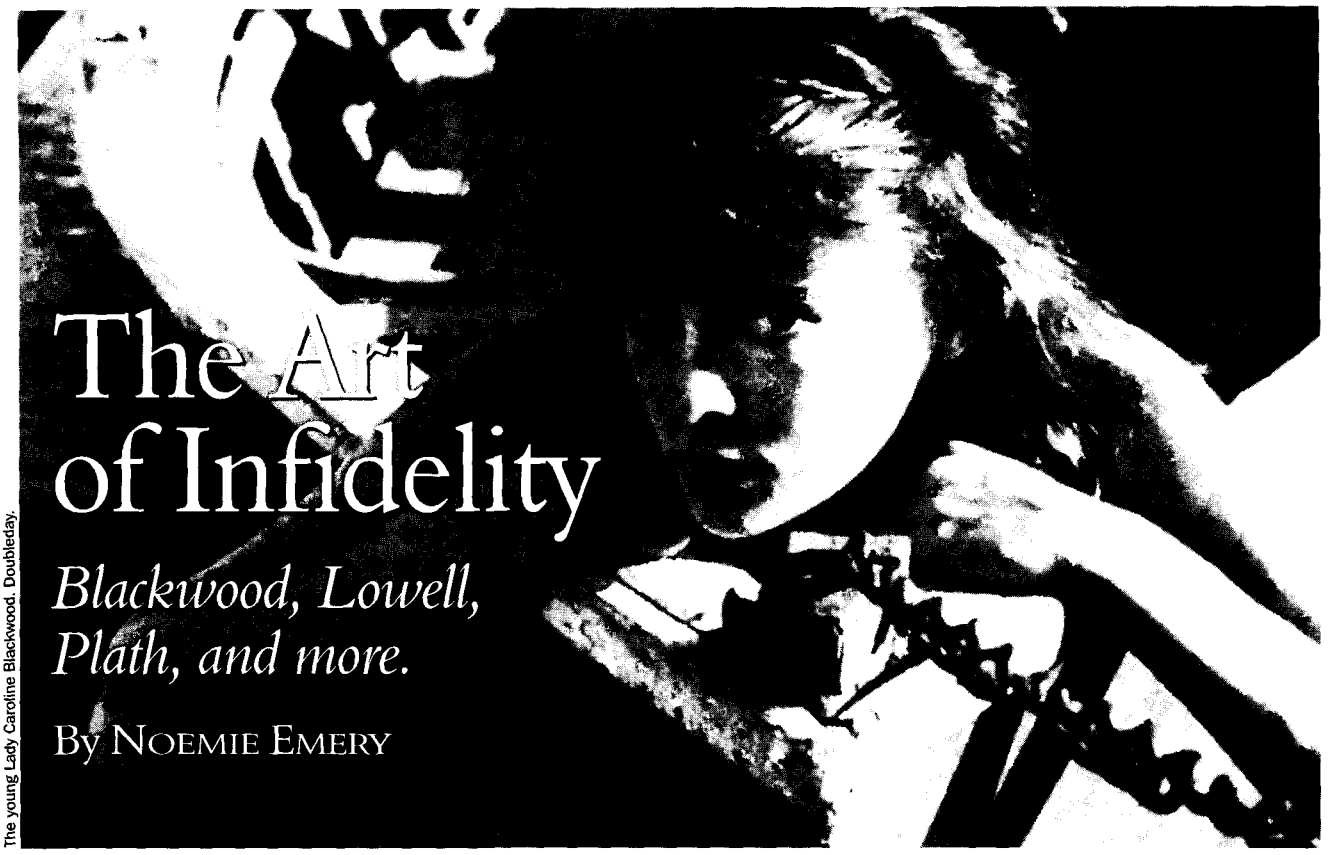

The young Lady Caroline Blackwood. Doubleday.

# The Art of Infidelity

## *Blackwood, Lowell, Plath, and more.*

By Noemie Emery

In 1959, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton, successful poets and failed suicides, took a course given by Robert Lowell, the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet and manic depressive, in the art of confessional poetry, the form in which all three would specialize. After class, Plath and Sexton would meet for drinks at the Ritz Carlton in Boston, to discuss poetry, Lowell, their various breakdowns, and past and future suicide attempts.

In 1974, Anne Sexton closed her garage door and turn on the ignition, gassing herself to death at forty-seven—following down the road her friend had traveled in 1963, when, at age thirty, Sylvia Plath turned on the gas oven in her London apartment, having first blocked the cracks in the doors so the fumes would not hurt her two children, and thoughtfully set out their morning milk.

Their lives were dominated by scenes of poetry, marital infidelity, divorce, and death. The connections and parallels among them seem almost infinite. Both Plath and Lowell did time in McLean, a mental hospital specializing in Boston's best breakdowns. Plath spent five months, from August 1953 to January 1954, after she had swallowed most of a bottle of sleeping pills and crawled into a basement to die. Lowell entered McLean for the first time in 1958, and would return three more times after that. At the time of her death, Plath was married to—and separated from—Ted Hughes, a young poet of infinite promise who would later become poet laureate of England before he died in 1998. By the time of his own death in 1977, Lowell had been married three times, to the short-story mistress Jean Stafford, the elegant essayist Elizabeth Hardwick, and the British aristocrat, Lady Caroline Blackwood—who had married three artists herself: the painter Lucian Freud, the composer Israel Citkowitz, and Lowell in 1972.

**Dangerous Muse**
*The Life of Lady Caroline Blackwood*
by Nancy Schoenberger
Doubleday, 376 pp., $27.50

The first biography of Caroline Blackwood, *Dangerous Muse*, by Nancy Schoenberger, has recently been published—joining at the bookstores the unexpurgated version of Sylvia Plath's journals and *Sylvia and Ted*, a novel about Hughes and Plath's marriage by British writer Emma Tennant, who, in the 1970s, had an affair with Ted Hughes. In fact, it was Emma Tennant's brother, Lord Glenconnor, who first owned *Girl in Bed*, Lucian Freud's most famous painting of Caroline Blackwood, which he later sold to Robert Lowell. And it was at a party in 1979 at the home of Emma Tennant that Blackwood's oldest daughter, Natalya, was given by Tennant's nephew the dose of heroin from which she would die.

Had they lived, Plath and Blackwood would today be seventy. When Plath died at thirty, she looked much like a schoolgirl. When Blackwood died in 1996 at age sixty-four, she resembled a crone. The two were alike in nothing—and simultaneously alike in too much.

Plath was American, born to Austrian immigrants, from the cash-strapped and striving middle class. Blackwood came from the aristocracy: monied, cold, and overripe. Plath was insecure, Blackwood self-confident. Plath was bourgeois, Blackwood bohemian.

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Plath was a perfectionist, an early Martha Stewart, who kept house by the rule of the women's magazines she loved and devoured. Blackwood was a sloven, turning any home into a hovel in short order. Plath wrote from childhood and was nationally published while still a teenager. Blackwood began writing late in her thirties. Plath was not technically beautiful, but still fit the mold of mid-1950s good looks, while Blackwood had stunning and "heart-stopping" beauty. Plath's life was broken by a *femme fatale*, who walked off with her husband. Blackwood *was* such a *femme fatale*, who took two of her three husbands away from their wives and their children. Both Plath and Blackwood had a drive toward darkness and death.

Lady Caroline Blackwood was born in Ireland in 1931, into the tranche of society that gave us the Mitford sisters: original, arrogant, gifted, and bent. From her father's side came descent from a line of lords and landowners (and the playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan). From her mother's came the Guinness brewery fortune, on which she sustained herself and her series of indignant husbands. From the start, Caroline showed a mordant sensibility wholly at odds with her angelic appearance. She was "disturbing but exciting," her friends report. She conveyed a "negative excitement"; "there was an extraordinary quality which I can only describe as a brilliant darkness"; "she was like a radiant disease." Said one close friend, Xandra Gowrie, "At every crossroad she saw someone being run over and mangled. Almost every minute of her life, she saw an appalling disaster happening right in front of her eyes."

To a certain kind of male artist, this combination would prove irresistible, and Caroline began at eighteen her lifelong career of attracting men who were not in great shape when she met them, thrilling them for a while, and leaving them burned out, embittered, or dead. "She chose her men for their instability and their looks," said one observer. Her first husband was Lucian Freud, grandson of Sigmund, darkly handsome, and none too stable. "Lucian was a very unfaithful husband," one of her friends notes. "Lying awake at night, it's like counting sheep, trying to figure out who his children are."

Freud painted a series of lyrical portraits, notably *Girl in Bed* (1952), which shows Caroline as fawn-like and luminous. But two years later, in 1954, when he painted *Hotel Bedroom*, the mood had notably darkened. Caroline looks anxiety-ridden, and Lucian Freud put himself in the picture "as if he had been skinned alive with his own hand." Two years after that, Caroline left him. "Lucian's painting changed violently after I left him," she later said. What certainly changed was his opinion of women: The tender portraits of his early years gave way to repellent and monstrous nudes.

*Lady Caroline Blackwood's father*

Caroline's second husband was the American composer Israel Citkowitz, once a boy wonder, who looked almost identical to Lucian Freud—who himself resembled Robert Lowell in his younger years. Caroline (one struggles to phrase this delicately) had three children while married to Citkowitz, and she seems to have married him in hopes of reviving his dormant creative abilities. Instead, he became a housemaid. "Caroline had Israel doing laundry," a friend of the couple complained. "He devoted himself to the children, while Caroline drank."

Having broken him down to the status of floor mop, Caroline moved back to London in 1970. But Citkowitz followed her, moving into the second floor of her townhouse, where he lived more or less as a nurse. His apartment was "catastrophic," said Jonathan Raban. "It always looked burgled. Once I stopped by and couldn't find him, so Caroline said I should call the police. I did, and when they came in they were alarmed, and thought that

*Lady Caroline Blackwood, age forty-three, in 1974.*



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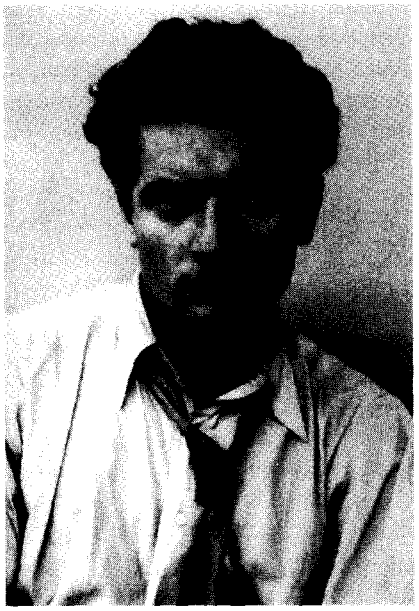

Doubleday

*. . . and her husbands: Lucian Freud, Israel Citkowitz, and Robert Lowell.*

the place *had* been burgled. I told them he always lived like that."

Meanwhile, Caroline, too, had deteriorated, drinking heavily and living in squalor. "She created a shambles wherever she went," said one acquaintance. Another recalls her talking brilliantly, with empty bottles rolling at her feet. She was also becoming a serious writer, starting with a request from Stephen Spender to review movies for his magazine. Her subjects would always be grim and depressing. As a friend noted, "Caroline . . . was a learner. She learned from her husbands. She had that magic thing that crossed the line of fantasy and metamorphosed into something creative. She loved to tell stories . . . always with a bad ending! It had to have that kick."

But, with her aristocratic entrée and her bankbook, Blackwood could afford to be dissolute. Sylvia Plath had no leeway at all. The signal event of her life was her professor-father's death when she was eight years old. It removed both an emotional stay and her family's main source of income. From then on, her mother sacrificed herself to her children—with the understanding that success would be enormous when it came.

Sylvia tried. She was published at eight in local newspapers, given a scholarship to Smith College, and awarded a guest editorship in the annual college issue of *Mademoiselle* magazine. She strained to become the model of complete excellence: poet and prom queen, dazzling soul of the American coed. She even briefly dyed her hair blonde. She wanted to have it all, to be John Donne *and* Martha Stewart, to write great works, have a great love, be a great mother, and graciously run an immaculate home.

The strain could be immense. In his poem "The Blue Flannel Suit," Hughes catches the edge of her terror:

> *Costly education had fitted you out. . . .*
> *What eyes waited at the back of the class*
> *To check your first professional performance*
> *Against their expectations. What assessors*
> *Waited to see you justify the cost.*

The cost was occasional bouts of "frozen inertia," as Plath wrote in her journals. "You felt scared, sick, lethargic . . . not wanting to cope . . . colossal desire to escape, retreat, not talk to anybody . . . . Fear of not succeeding. . . . Fear of failing to live up to the fast and furious prize-winning pace of these last years." Back home in Wellesley, after her stint in New York, she was rejected by a writing class at Harvard's summer school, and she went into a tailspin, attempting suicide. Found in the cellar by her mother and brother, she was sent to McLean—and discharged five months later as cured.

In 1955 she won a Fulbright scholarship to England, and she impressed the British, still drained from the war, with her American vigor and bounce. In his first poems, Hughes cites her endless legs, her "American grin," her "long hair, loose waves—your Veronica Lake bangs. Not what it hid." "What it hid" was the scar from electric-shock treatment. This scar, masked by the blonde sweep of normalcy, was his permanent image of Plath.

Tall and talented, hungry and fierce, the poets seemed made for each other. There was work, there were books, adorable children, a picture-book cottage in Devon. In Sylvia's eyes, the whole thing was heaven. For Hughes, as Tennant pictures him in her novel, the picture was blacker. There were panics, outbursts, bad dreams of her father, dark fears. Sylvia, Tennant says, could not laugh or relax. "Sylvia always makes too much of a fuss. A headache, a tiny burn from the recipe she worries over hour after hour, is enough to bring grief, anger, hysteria." Always, there is the need to seem perfect. And then, the perfect world is blown apart.

In 1961, the Hugheses left their London flat for a new house in Devon,



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Bettmann / CORBIS

*Top: Sylvia Plath, c. 1956.*
*Middle: In 1958, with Ted Hughes.*
*Bottom: In 1962, with her children, Frieda and Nicholas.*

subletting their apartment to David Wevill, a Canadian poet, and his wife, Assia Guttman, a ravishing beauty, thrice married, with an international and exotic past. In the spring of 1962, Ted and Sylvia invited the Wevills for a weekend in Devon. They arrived on Friday and left on Sunday, and on Monday, Hughes was on the train to London to begin his affair with Assia Wevill.

"In the next weeks," Tennant says, "Sylvia wrenches the telephone cord from the wall . . . makes a bonfire of her husband's manuscripts . . . feeding the flames with his hair clippings, nails . . . drives the station wagon off the road." Distraught, feverish, losing weight, Sylvia begins to pour out her *Ariel* poems, long screams of rage at her husband and father. In the fall of 1962, both Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath move, separately, back to London. Sylvia starts an affair that does not make her happy. She makes a surprise visit to Hughes's flat and sees that Assia is pregnant. Days later, she turns on the gas.

Curiously, Caroline Blackwood's next affair also began with housing in London. In the summer of 1970, Robert Lowell went to a party in London to see Xandra Gowrie and stayed too late to go back to Oxford, where he was teaching. So, Gowrie reports, "I turned to Caroline and said, 'Caroline, you've got lots of room, you have him,' and they left together, and that was that." Lowell went home with Caroline Blackwood and, in some senses, never moved out. He began work on volumes of poetry that celebrate Caroline as an enchantress—and enrage many by including passages from letters from his anguished wife, Elizabeth Hardwick, and Harriet, their little girl. In September 1971, Caroline bore Lowell a son named Sheridan, a year before they married.

As with Hughes and Plath, Lowell and Blackwood seemed made for each other, sometimes in ominous ways. "They were both drinkers, and clever," said Xandra Gowrie. "They both smoked endlessly, and didn't wash much. . . . Both lived near the edge." Lowell often went over it, into manic delusions. This had been handled as well as possible by the stable and motherly Hardwick, but Blackwood was a different matter. As Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald had proved decades earlier, alcoholics and the mentally ill may enchant one another, but do not wear well. "We're like two eggs cracking," Lowell wrote. Lost once again in emotional transit, he began to be worn down by anxiety. In 1977, he died of a heart attack in a New York taxi on his way back to Elizabeth Hardwick—Lucian Freud's portrait, *Girl in Bed*, in his arms.

By this time, Caroline no longer resembled the girl in that portrait, her beauty eroded by drinking and strain. In 1976, she had produced a short novel, *The Stepdaughter*, which was widely praised. In it, the heroine deeply resents the unlovely child foisted on her by her renegade husband. In particular, the novel is a savage portrait of her daughter Natalya, her least gifted child, and the one least able to cope in her chaotic household. By 1978, the seventeen-year-old was addicted to heroin. She died a year later, having drowned in her tub. Caroline's nihilism was deepened and darkened by guilt. "She saw Natalya's death as a suicide she had caused," a friend said, correctly. "She saw how destructive and cruel she had been."

For the rest of her life, she would shuttle between London and the house that she bought on Long Island, writing amid her chaos and squalor. Empty bottles were the usual décor of her dwellings, and she was put on a list of unwelcome visitors by some of the country's leading hotels. Before she reached fifty, her hair had turned white, and her face had coarsened beyond all recognition. The darkness inside had at last become visible. A moralist might say she had the face she deserved. The end came in 1996, from cervical cancer, though she had never recovered from the deaths of Natalya and Lowell, and from her own part in causing them. "She was furious that her dream of love had not been realized in Lowell," said one of her lovers.



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Need one point out that this was Sylvia Plath's complaint against Ted Hughes? Three weeks after Plath's suicide, Assia Wevill aborted her child. Six years after that, she too gassed herself, killing also her small daughter, Shura, the out-of-wedlock child that she bore to Ted Hughes.

Hughes never wrote of this later catastrophe. But near the end of the 1970s he began to write the verses that make up *Birthday Letters*, the long sequence of eighty-eight poems that trace his relationship with Sylvia Plath from before their first meeting (when he sees a picture of the Fulbright scholars) to the years after her suicide, as he tries to cope with their distracted children, listening to the howling of wolves. Hughes slights his own role in her suicide, seeing himself, Assia, and Sylvia as victims of destiny, actors performing roles in a prescripted drama:

*You wanted*
*To be with your father*
*In wherever he was.*
*And your body*
*Barred your passage*
*And your family*
*Who were your flesh and blood*
*Burdened it.*

It's certain that Hughes is much to blame; having one's husband get another woman pregnant does not make a girl happy. But even before his infidelity—even before their marriage—Sylvia Plath had been more than half in love with easeful death. It was not Ted Hughes who led her into that basement in Wellesley or who prompted the cheerful discussions of self-termination in her girl-talking sessions with Anne Sexton. Indeed, according to Sexton, it was Plath who first brought up the topic, telling "the story of her first suicide in sweet and loving detail."

Sylvia Plath was a brittle reed, waiting to break whenever a rejection hurt the image of her own perfection—as the 1953 rejection by Harvard broke her temporarily, as the 1962 rejection by Hughes broke her forever. The girl who insisted on having it all could not bear to have less than everything. And so, she chose to have nothing at all. ♦

# The Last Boomer

## *Joe Queenan on his generation and himself.*

**BY JEREMY LOTT**

The novelist James Ellroy once described Joe Queenan as "half-Calvinist, half-nihilist." But, for most of the 1990s, the nihilist seemed predominant. From *The Unkindest Cut* to *Confessions of a Cineplex Heckler*, Queenan continued to double back on his own well-trodden steps, making a living by skewering movies, celebrities, and the odd fat cat.

**Balsamic Dreams**
*A Short But Self-Important History of the Baby Boomer Generation*
by Joe Queenan
Henry, Holt & Company, 240 pp., $23

*Jeremy Lott is senior editor of* Spintech Magazine.

Even *My Goodness*, last year's chronicle of a tongue-firmly-held-in-cheek attempt to clean up his act, mocked mostly liberal Hollywood do-goodism. He practiced "Random Acts of Kindness" and "Senseless Acts of Beauty" and started the "Make a Wish, As Long As the Wish Doesn't Cost More Than Fifty Bucks, Foundation." Through all of this he resisted the urge to drop his apolitical cloak (taken up after the flop of his attack on Dan Quayle, *Imperial Caddy*) or engage in broader cultural criticism.

But now, with *Balsamic Dreams: A Short But Self-Important History of the Baby Boomer Generation*, Queenan chucks the cloak and finally attempts to think Big Thoughts. The results are mixed.

In response to his impending doom by some undiagnosed disease in the summer of 2000, Queenan immediately "started taking piano lessons." "It was something I'd always wanted to do," he explains. He picked up the works of Proust and Gibbon to read, signed up for cooking classes and flying lessons, and stopped by the YMCA to hire a personal trainer because he "wanted to look sharp at the funeral." Queenan looked into all the options for where to have his ashes spread, finally deciding upon the Seine in France.

When the doctor finally diagnosed his ailment as nothing more than a particularly bad bout of hay fever, he was relieved. He canceled all of the newly scheduled diversions and thanked his lucky charms that he would be around to enjoy his wife and two kids. But that night, his sleep was "deeply troubled." Queenan realized just how "venal and self-centered my reaction to the specter of death had been." No last confession, no attempts to reconcile with aggrieved friends and relatives, no bequests to charity, no last advice for his children—only one last rush to fit in all that cool stuff he'd missed out on. "I was quietly coming to terms with the fact that [underneath] the lovingly crafted façade of charm, wit, sophistication, and class that masqueraded as a personality, I was a basically worthless person," he says.

As his justification for this probably apocryphal tale, Queenan pleads peer pressure: "a prototypical product of the Me Decade, I only knew how to respond to the world insofar as the world responded to *moi*." According to this theory, the root cause of Joe Queenan's boorishness is not his own indifference but the tide of the generational zeitgeist. He uses the story to denounce his peers as an "appalling generation" who started out good but



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quickly degenerated into one of the biggest demographic duds the world has ever known.

"The single most damning, and obvious criticism that can be leveled at the Baby Boomers," Queenan writes in the chapter entitled "J'Accuse," "is, of course, that they promised that they wouldn't sell out and become fiercely materialistic like their parents, and then they did." Worse, boomers compounded the problem by insisting that they had not, in fact, sold out. Thus, even as they made a killing on the stock market, sent their kids to expensive private schools, and began to grasp the various toggle switches of power, they insisted on doing daffy things like voting for Democrats, eating Ben & Jerry's ice cream, and refusing to age gracefully.

Most of the short work is spent describing and denouncing such obvious inanities peculiar to boomers as retroactive political correctness (removing the beaver fur around Ben Franklin's neck on $100 bills because we just don't go for that sort of thing any more) and the glorification of pop culture (Andy Warhol).

There are flashes of the unrestrained viciousness that Joe Queenan fans have come to treasure, but the center of *Balsamic Dreams* is Joe Queenan's attempt at ad hoc sociology. Here, for instance, is Queenan on Seattle's eyesore/rock museum/tragic, tragic mistake, the Experience Music Project:

> [The museum] is a series of micro-museums of what is personally important to a select group of Baby Boomers. "Here's a load of crap associated with third-tier Pacific Northwest bands I used to listen to when I was growing up. I really liked them; they meant a lot to me; I hope you enjoy them." In the end, it's a bit like opening a Museum of Black Leather Vests. Here's my vest, circa 1975. Here's my vest ten years later. Here are my friends' vests, circa 1976. And here are some vests that belonged to some guys from Tacoma back in the 1960s. God, did we look cool in our vests. Don't forget to check our gift shop so you can do the most ridiculous thing of all in post-Baby Boomer America, which is to buy pointless memorabilia in a museum devoted to pointless memorabilia.

In the penultimate chapter, "Aging Disgracefully," Queenan makes a series of suggestions for how boomers can recover some semblance of dignity and curry favor with their children, who will have something to say about the choice of nursing homes. On the merits, his suggestions run from the good "massively reduce videotaping" to the basically sound "rethink the dancing issue" to the invaluable "stop sharing your feelings." My personal favorite: "Fear not the Republican within."

He ends with a "personal note" that expresses hope for the future of his generation. Boomers may yet "recapture the idealism of our youth" and "reassert ourselves as the crusaders we were" in the 1960s. In order to accomplish this feat, however, they "have to stop the incessant navel-gazing [and] reacquire a sense of personal dignity. Most important, we have to stop talking about ourselves."

That utopian "idealism" for which Queenan pines is at least partly the cause of the boomers' casual attitude to the norms that kept their parents from going off the rails.

But, still, if you've ever had to listen to the boomers rhapsodizing about their idyllic youth—and who among us has escaped this torture?—all you can say after reading *Balsamic Dreams* is: Amen. ♦

# Candy Kirn

*Walter Kirn's delectable novel takes a surprising turn.* **BY JOHN PODHORETZ**

Thirty-nine-year-old Walter Kirn is an uncommon writer—the only American novelist of his generation who has also done serious work as a book critic. He has offered careful and nuanced criticism of such efforts at serious and ambitious fiction as David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* and Russell Banks's *Cloudsplitter*, but has always taken on the sacred cows of New York publishing when he feels he has to. Kirn absolutely will not stand for earnest Big Think about the Nature of America at the Turn of the Century. After quoting a particularly ominous passage from Susan Faludi's *Stiffed* about how the post-industrial economy had literally led to impotence, Kirn memorably snapped: "Oh, knock it off, Nurse Ratched."

He comes at things from a perspective markedly different from most young novelists. In an astonishing op-ed published in the *New York Times* in 1997, Kirn offered a definitive criticism of what he called the Crybaby Boomers. "First the members of the 60s generation hated their parents. Now they hate their kids," he wrote of a poll about American attitudes toward teenagers.

> The generation that gave us instant divorce, pot, speed and insider trading is worried about the moral failings of the young? Please. If I were fifteen now and thus charged with moral corruption, I'd take a long, hard look at my prosecutors, beginning with, but not limited to, their Role-Model-in-Chief. Bill Clinton's America may be prosperous, but morally exemplary it's not.

The native Minnesotan was born to parents who became Mormons when Kirn was very young. And though his writing is shot through with disaffection for the Latter-day Saints and their cosmology, Kirn's upbringing has giv-

*John Podhoretz is a contributing editor to* THE WEEKLY STANDARD.



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en him a powerful sense of an America seldom seen in present-day fiction. He writes about Reagan voters, the world of Bush Red. Kirn's characters are middle-class, middle-American strivers and their children, all hungry to believe in a gospel—whether the faith is based in Baptist or Mormon theology, or twelve-stepping, or motivational speakers, or obscure management theories.

His first novel, the 1992 *She Needed Me*, is about a desperate young pro-lifer who makes eye contact during a protest at an abortion clinic with a desperate young pregnant woman and grows determined to save her unborn baby. *She Needed Me* is nearly unique in attempting a sympathetic and fully imagined portrait of a born-again Christian. His encounter with the young woman leads him to go hunting for her one night without shoes on his feet:

> I called out Kim's name as I circled the block. I could feel pieces of glass and sidewalk grit nicking the soles of my feet, but I kept going. I walked for half an hour, trying to ignore the pain and thinking that if I absorbed enough of it God would help me find her. It was crucial. At seven weeks the fetus forms eyelids. At eleven, hands.

Weaver's struggle for belief and his attempt to live a genuinely Christian life make him one of the most touching characters in contemporary fiction. Anyone who read that book and then picked up Kirn's second, *Thumbsucker*, upon its publication in 1999 was bound to be shocked. *Thumbsucker* is as sour as *She Needed Me* is sweet, an acrid portrait of a boy growing up confused in the morning-in-America America of the early 1980s.

The narrator, Justin Cobb, is the son of a sporting-goods salesman who worships Ronald Reagan and a nurse who tries to scrape the Reagan bumper sticker off the family car. Pulled this way and that—by a father who wants to hunt and fish with his boy like in the old days and a mother full of post-modern homilies learned at the drug-treatment center where she works—Justin can't stop sucking his thumb even into his teens and eventually finds relief only in Ritalin.

The entire Cobb family—father Mike, mother Audrey, Justin and his younger brother Joel—finds itself entranced by the promise of domestic peace offered by two elders of the Mormon church. Kirn, again mining territory untouched by other novelists of his age, offers a careful and attentive portrait of the Cobb family's conversion. "What I hadn't counted on," Justin relates, "was the novelty of a religion whose sacred places—the farm in upstate New York where God and Jesus had appeared to Joseph Smith, the trail of exile across Nebraska's plains, the promised land of the Utah desert—were located in America, close by, where a person could actually see them for himself."

Doubleday

**Up in the Air**
by Walter Kirn
Doubleday, 303 pp., $23.95

Justin hopes his new creed will give him the strength to get off Ritalin. But on a trip with other Mormon youth he discovers two troublesome things: First, that faith alone cannot actually alleviate the symptoms of Attention Deficit Disorder. And second, that the church would very much like it if this boy, who can still barely keep his thumb out of his mouth, were married by his eighteenth birthday. Bitter, funny, cool-eyed, and unsettling, *Thumbsucker* is a memorable novel but not at all a likable one—and the always honest Kirn does nothing to make his annoying characters any more ingratiating than one imagines their real-life models must be.

With his newly released third novel, Kirn spins off into yet another unexpected direction. *Up in the Air* is a satirical portrait of a turn-of-the-millennium Corporate Man. Ryan Bingham is a thirty-five-year-old consultant who spends so much time on planes and in hotel rooms, in fact, that he no longer even has a home on the ground. He is, instead, a resident of a place he calls Airworld. "My hometown papers are *USA Today* and the *Wall Street Journal*," Ryan tells us. "My literature . . . is the bestseller or the near-bestseller, heavy on themes of espionage, high finance, and the goodness of common people in small towns. . . . Airworld is a nation within a nation, with its own language, architecture, mood, and even its own currency—the token economy of airline bonus miles I've come to value more than dollars."

Kirn follows Ryan through a week in his life. His family is trying to drag him back to earth to involve him in his emotionally fragile sister's wedding, but he's frantically trying to stay airborne because he is just about to become only the tenth passenger in the history of Great West Airlines to deposit one million miles into his frequent-flyer account.

Once he reaches that landmark, Ryan intends to quit his job helping other companies fire their midlevel employees while dazzling the newly unemployed with noxious pep talks about the glorious future: "Our role is to make limbo tolerable, to ferry wounded souls across the river of dread and humiliation and self-doubt to the point at which hope's bright



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shore is dimly visible, and then to stop the boat and make them swim while we row back to the palace."

He's so good at it that he is booked to speak about his experiences at GoalQuest, a mammoth motivational convention in Las Vegas whose starring attraction is Norman Schwarzkopf. Along the way he visits with a Peter Drucker-like consultant whose gnomic utterances he wishes to market as part of an overall office-design "environment"—but must excuse himself when the old man wants Ryan to join him and his wife in a threesome.

What really matters to Ryan are those miles, and he begins to grow paranoid. Is the buccaneering head of Great West Airlines doing everything he can to hinder and delay Ryan's achievement? Why has someone in India been issued tickets using his frequent-flyer account? Who ordered a remote-control lawnmower with Ryan's American Express miles card, forcing Ryan to cancel the card just when he needs more miles?

*Up in the Air* is a sensational caricature of a moment in time—a moment that may already have passed between the day Kirn finished his manuscript and the book's publication, given the current atmosphere of economic gloom. But the novel is more than a parodic portrait of corporate flapdoodle, and Ryan Bingham is more than a stick-figure Bobo.

Ryan is onto something when he celebrates Airworld. There is something authentic about it, if only because it's an entirely new phenomenon. He contrasts it with a disillusioning trip he took with a girlfriend after college where they tried to play *On the Road* to disastrous effect:

> Too many movies had turned the deserts to sets. The all-night coffee shops served Egg Beaters. And everywhere, from dustiest Nebraska to swampiest Louisiana, folks were expecting us, the road-trip pilgrims. They sold us Route 66 T-shirts, and they took credit cards. The hitchhikers didn't tell us stories, they just slept, and the gas stations were self-service, no toothless grease monkeys.

In Airworld, people become immediately intimate, like travelers on board the ocean liners of old. They have no reason to lie to each other because they expect nothing of one another and want nothing from one another.

And in a breathtaking though overly rushed conclusion, Kirn reveals that there's a very real reason Ryan Bingham feels more at home up in the air than on solid ground. For we learn that solid ground once proved far less solid and far more dangerous to Ryan than even a plane caught in severe turbulence.

"This is the place to see America," Ryan says of Airworld. One could say the same of Walter Kirn's three fascinating and promising novels, which presage a distinguished and endlessly surprising career. ♦

# Look, Ma, No Hands

## *Why must every Hollywood movie have wire-fighting scenes?* BY JONATHAN V. LAST

Hollywood has always run on the principle that what worked before must work again—and again and again and again, in movie after movie, until theatergoers reach the point of throwing things at the screen. The most recent example of mindless repetition is gravity-defying martial arts. And the time has come to clip its wings.

"Wire work," as it is called in the film world, involves harnessing actors and suspending them from thin cables high in the air. With teams of people tugging on the lines, the actors are able to soar across the screen, delivering a dozen kicks in a single jump or leaping gracefully from the ground to the rooftops. Wire work has long been a trope in Hong Kong kung-fu and sword-fighting epics, and now, like the Asian flu, it has infected American entertainment.

Modern wire work first came to America in the surprise hit of 1999, *The Matrix*, a science-fiction film directed by Andy and Larry Wachowski. *The Matrix* featured a buffed-up Keanu Reeves soaring on wires like a latter day Sandy Duncan, delivering spine-shuddering kicks and claiming, in his Keanu way, "I know kung fu!" Made with a budget of $63 million, it grossed $374 million worldwide.

If there's anything development executives understand, it's a profit of $311 million. Like sheep, everyone in Hollywood seemed to decide that the film's success was due to this alien special effect. And so wire work began popping up everywhere, from the schlock movie version of *Charlie's Angels* to the Oscar-winning *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, from Pamela Anderson's *VIP* to the Goth police series *Witchblade*. *The Matrix* even became a verb in script notes—as in "Why don't we Matrix this up some?"—and then finally, with this summer's mini-hit *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*, it became a story idea unto itself.

Wire work has its roots in the earliest Chinese cinema, dating as far back as the 1928 *Burning of the Red Lotus Monastery*, which film historian David Bordwell notes involved over three hundred martial artists and extensive use of wires. Wire work went into decline, however, and by the 1970s Chinese film-making—centered mostly in non-Communist Hong Kong and Taiwan—was dominated by wireless kung-fu movies. These films even made some inroads in the United

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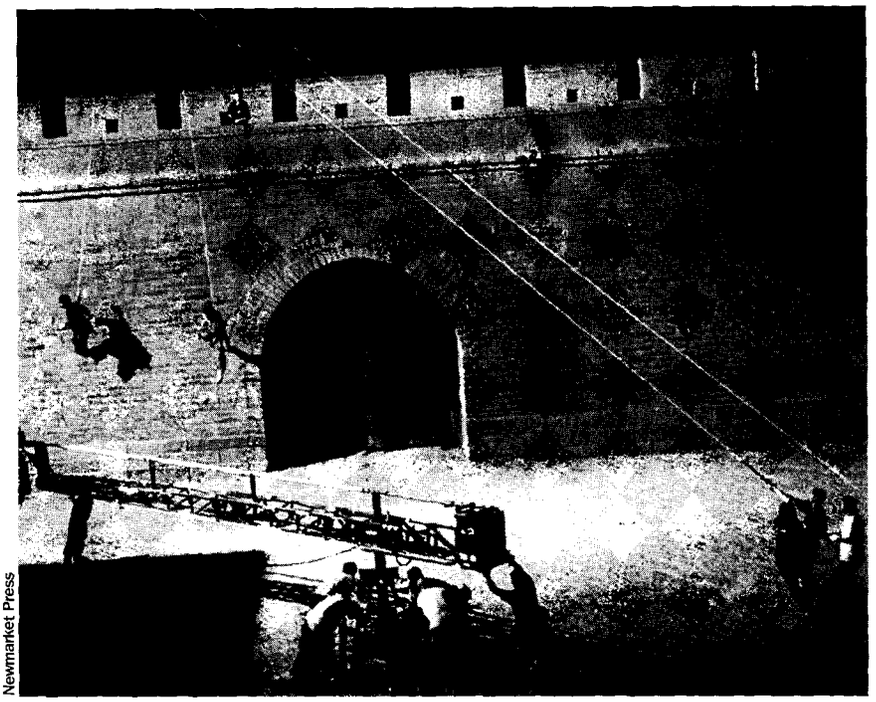

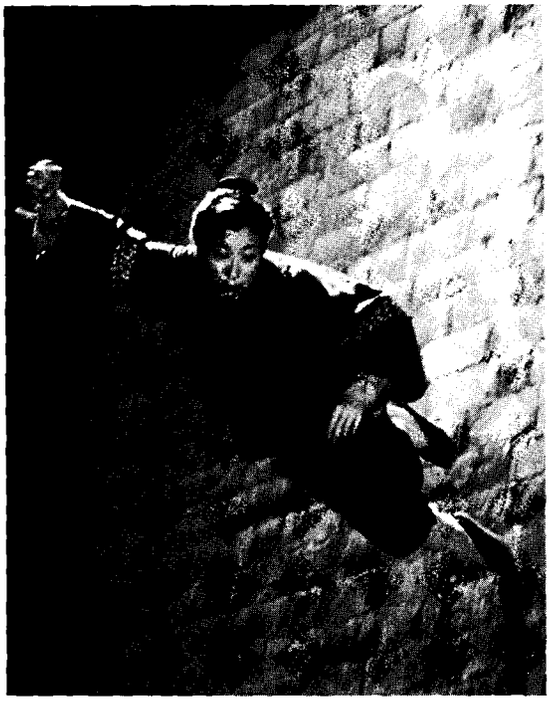

Newmarket Press

*Left: How wire-work is filmed. Right: How it looks on screen.*

States, as chop-socky became hip in the disco age.

In the 1980s, swords and wire work reappeared in Chinese movies, most notably in the high-flying *Duel to the Death* (1982). This new Hong Kong style was mostly missed in America, where Bruce Lee and kung-fu theater went the way of the pet rock. But then in 1987 a video-game maker released a modest little game called *Street Fighter*. It was a runaway success, and its 1991 sequel, *Street Fighter II*, became a cultural event, invading 7-Elevens and mall arcades across the nation. The *Street Fighter* games featured one-on-one combat as kids took control of cheesy martial-arts warriors and tried to beat the tar out of each other by flipping joysticks and pounding buttons—while the characters performed outrageous martial-arts moves, throwing lightning strikes and gliding to and fro as though they themselves were on wires.

*Street Fighter* succeeded where Chinese filmmakers had failed in planting the seed of the Hong Kong aesthetic in America. Which brings us back to *The Matrix*. During pre-production in 1997, the Wachowski brothers hired Yuen Wo Ping, a veteran fight choreographer, to, well, Matrix up *The Matrix*. Specializing in balletic wire work, Wo Ping brought a sensibility to *The Matrix* which had never been seen in the West by mass audiences. He became, naturally, a Hollywood darling.

The year after *The Matrix*, Wo Ping choreographed Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. In this, the high-water mark of wire work, Lee and Wo Ping paid homage to nearly every cliché in Chinese cinema: the bamboo grove combat of *A Touch of Zen* (1971), the roof-top chase of *The Jade Bow* (1966), the temple battle of *Legendary Weapons of China* (1982), and the inn melee from *Dragon Gate Inn* (1967). The cinematography and choreography of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* are so lovely that they obscure the pure ludicrousness of the movie.

In fact, there may be some connection between wire work and the vapidity of Hong Kong movies. For one thing, wire work takes forever to shoot. "On a hundred-day shooting schedule," says Ang Lee, "maybe eighty days would be spent on the martial arts scenes, twenty days to do the rest, so they don't have time to get into the script."

Above all, however, wire work seems to be indicative of a Chinese sensibility that values the visual, the visceral, the emotional above the intellectual. Director Ringo Lam told *Hong Kong Film Magazine*, "I like visuals and simple stories. I would prefer my movies to have very little dialogue." Which is why so many Chinese movies have the same rice-paper plots: a young upstart seeking revenge or a middle-aged warrior seeking revenge or an old master seeking revenge.

In his excellent book *Planet Hong Kong*, Bordwell notes that during the last twenty years, while American movies have dominated the global marketplace, they have accounted for as little as 30 percent of Hong Kong's audiences. Recently, however, they've been gaining ground. In 1997, for the first time, Hollywood productions took more than half of that Chinese till.

That leaves open, of course, the question of who is infiltrating whom. Meanwhile Lara Croft still dances up walls and across ceilings, Wo Ping is working on two sequels to *The Matrix*, and this fall *The Musketeer* will open in a theater near you. It's an updated telling of Alexandre Dumas's *The Three Musketeers*, and in the trailer D'Artagnan jumps and flies just like Keanu. ♦



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**"Israel Kills Palestinian Activist"**

—Washington Post *headline, August 28, 2001*

**"Palestinian anger increases each time Israeli troops attempt to kill one of their activists."**

—*NPR's "Morning Edition," August 24, 2001*

Parody

# Mustafa Zibri: An Activist With a Cause

*By* LEE HOCKSTADER
*Washington Post Foreign Service*

BEDOLAH, Gaza Strip—Palestinian activist Mustafa Zibri faces a dilemma each morning. On the one hand, he likes to lie around in bed listening to the "Joan Baez Hour" on Palestinian radio. On the other hand, he knows he should be out collecting signatures for the anti-fur petitions he sends to Neiman Marcus. "I know that if us activists from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine aren't out there each morning, then the activists from Islamic Jihad and Hamas will be, and they'll end up with more signatures," Zibri says. "I consider consciousness-raising on the fur issue one of the most important things we do, right up there with blowing up Israeli teenagers," Zibri adds.

Zibri, who coordinates CNN's coverage of the Middle East in his spare time, discovered his activism early on. "I was at Bennington College, studying pottery, interpretive dance, and jewelry making," he says, when he began organizing a Nestlé boycott. "Pretty soon I was volunteering for Greenpeace and Amnesty International in the morning and spraying Jewish day-care centers with machine gun fire in the afternoon," he recalls. "It was a really hectic time."

Soon he had drifted out to Berkeley, and started working in organic health food stores. "Right now I'm involved in pushing the Zionist entity into the sea, but my first love is whole grains," he notes. During the 1970s, he became disillusioned with the course of his career as an activist, he recalls. "It was just an endless round of anti-nuke rallies, hijackings, and Olympic massacres. I really started questioning what relevance it all had to everyday problems."

Realizing that he could think globally, but bomb locally, Zibri moved to Tripoli, where he organized small scale highway shootings and school bus explosions. His new activities didn't have the global scope of some of his early activism, but he has found validation in one-on-one activity. A few years ago, he moved to Palestine, after the Oslo process permitted all of the dispersed PLO activists to return to their homeland, bringing their mortars and high explosives with them.

"I thought I was going to hate leaving Berkeley," Zibri says. "In the first place, I wouldn't be able to listen to NPR anymore. But then I found that the Palestinian state radio has shows just like it. There's 'Morning Jihad' and 'The Bomb Guys.' Suicide bombers call in who are having trouble getting their explosives to detonate. The Bomb Guys figure it out for them. They're hysterically funny."

Zibri smiles—even under the crushing jackboot of Israeli apartheid.

*See* **ACTIVIST**, *A20, Col. 1*



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# Still Fighting Florida

**Robert Zelnick is a research fellow at the Hoover Institution and acting director of the Boston University Department of Journalism.**

After the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights reported in June that black voters in Florida had been discriminated against in last fall's presidential election, dissenting commission members asked scholar John R. Lott Jr. to take a look at the commission's numbers. Lott's analysis shows that the majority's selective statistical review had led to a distorted conclusion.

The commission found, for example, "a direct correlation between race and having one's vote discounted as a spoiled ballot." But Lott found that the highest rates of rejected ballots from African Americans came in counties controlled by Democrats with black election supervisors. **Clearly voter error was linked to education, income, and literacy. But the innuendo of wrongdoing dies hard.**

Remember the fuss over "undervotes?" About 2 percent of the ballots recorded no vote for the presidency. Most of the "decisions" made by politically agnostic, racially neutral machines were because voters had failed to follow instructions.

But how would the "stolen election" crowd respond to an outrageous case of ballot disqualification engineered by politically motivated human beings?

Enter the *New York Times* with its July analysis on the treatment of overseas absentee ballots. Here, there were several reasons to count every vote. First, most voters were absent because they were serving their country. Also, a 1986 federal law allows Americans living abroad who fail to receive state absentee ballots to cast a generic federal ballot. For good measure, a 1980s consent decree forced Florida to end a rule disqualifying overseas ballots that do not have an Army Post Office, Fleet Post Office, or overseas postmark.

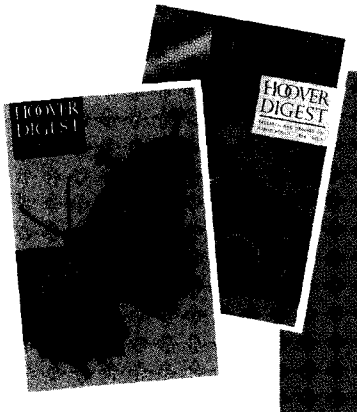
Nevertheless, an army of Gore lawyers fanned out across Florida determined to block as many of the feared military ballots as possible. In counties won by Mr. Bush, 29 percent of the overseas ballots were disqualified; in those captured by Mr. Gore, the figure was 60 percent. A federal judge later held that hundreds of overseas ballots were improperly thrown out either because they failed to carry an overseas postmark or because officials had no proof voters' using the generic federal ballot had met the deadline for requesting absentee state ballots.

Did the *Times* inveigh against this gross disenfranchisement of U.S. servicepeople and others? No, the newspaper charged instead that, since ballots with the same characteristics had been counted by some Florida counties, Bush's Florida victory had been tainted by "flawed ballots." Thus, counting a vote where the voter had failed to follow instructions is good, but counting what a federal court held were valid votes of military forces is bad.

**The enduring effort to discredit Bush's election does little harm to his presidency. Rather, it feeds the already pervasive sense of cynicism about national institutions,** the feeling that everything is rigged and nothing is fair. Whereas some seek to restore the temple of trust on which free government must stand, others play penny-ante Sampson and shake that temple to its foundation.

*— Robert Zelnick*

Paid for by the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

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